Bible Study Fellowship®

KINGDOM DIVIDED

30 LESSONS

Welcome to Bible Study Fellowship! We're glad you're here.

At BSF, we exist to magnify God and mature His people through in-depth Bible study.

As you encounter God through His Word in BSF this year, we pray you grow to know and love Him more, trust Him more fully, and reflect His Son, Jesus Christ, more clearly.

Each week, as you engage with God's Word personally and in community, we invite you to draw on BSF's distinct four-fold approach to in-depth Bible study, which incorporates the following:

1. **Questions for Personal Study**

   Each week's lesson includes questions rooted in a weekly Bible passage, intended for personal, daily study and designed to develop heart connection with God. This lesson book contains the Lesson Questions and lays the groundwork for meaningful small group discussion.

2. **Small Group Discussion**

   Each week's BSF gathering includes a small group discussion centered on the weekly Bible passage.

3. **Lecture**

   Each week's study includes teaching on the weekly Bible passage developed and delivered by a BSF-trained Bible teacher. Note-taking pages are provided in this lesson book to use as you listen.

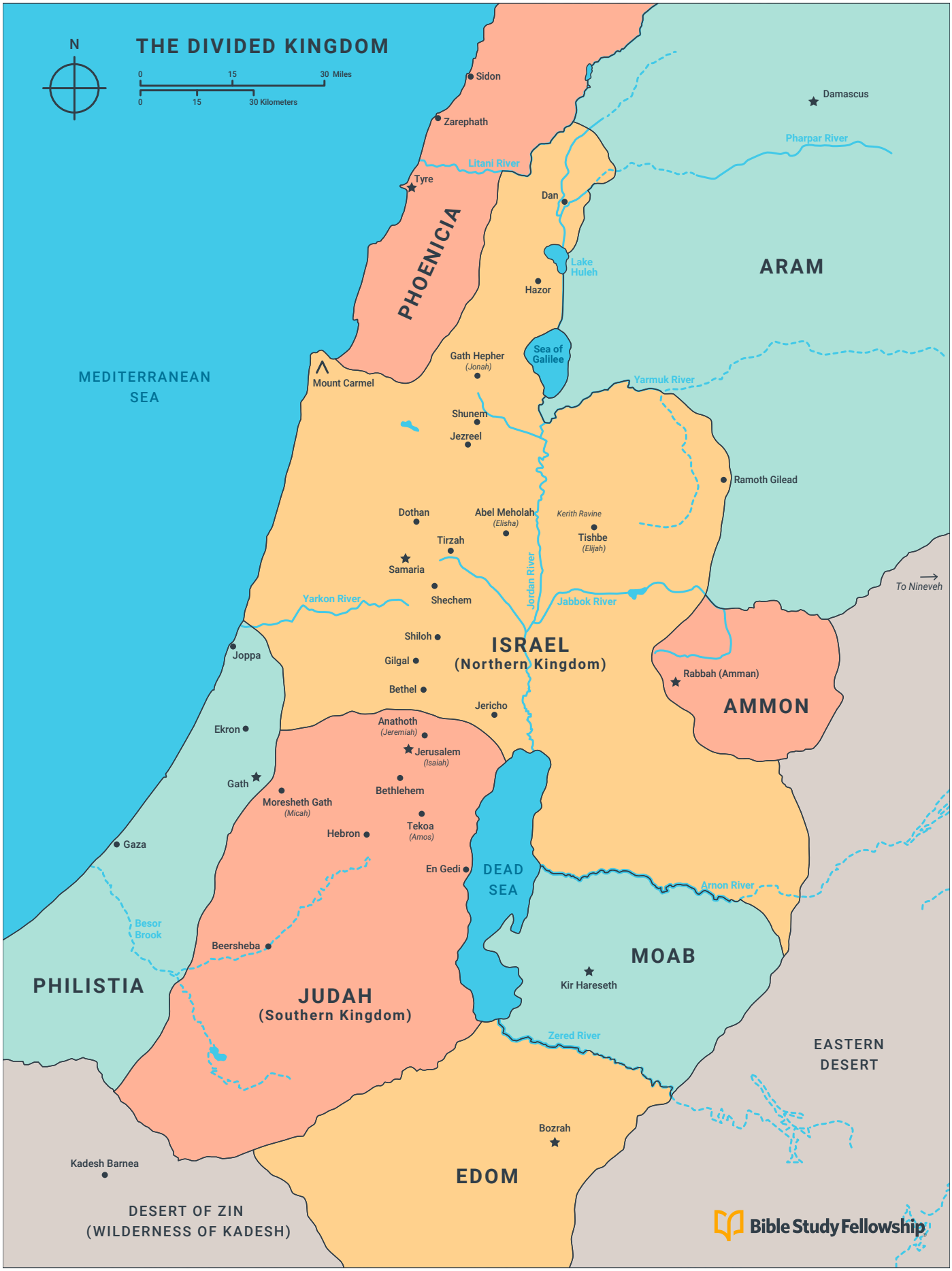
4. **Lesson Notes**

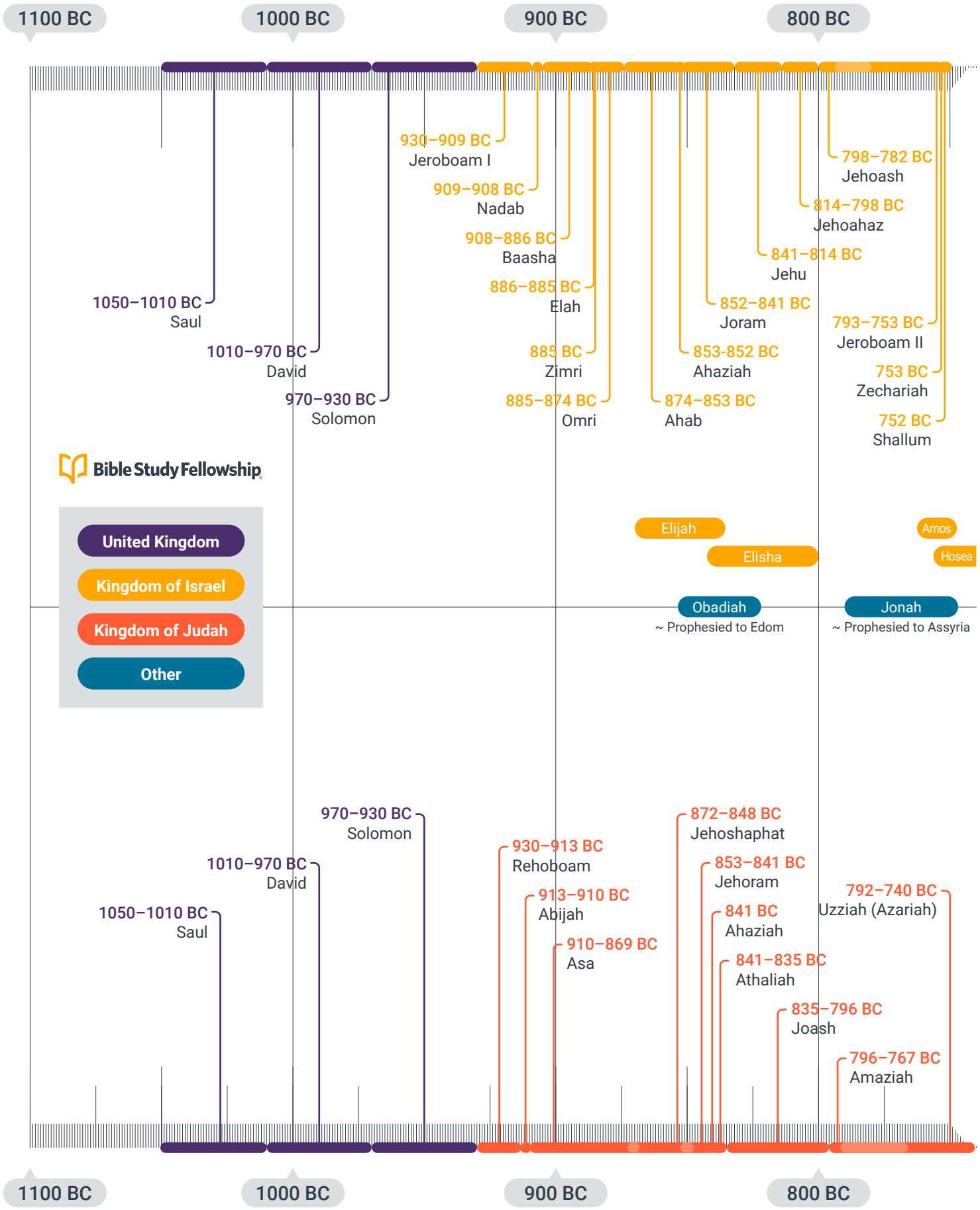
   This lesson book contains a written explanation of the weekly Bible passage developed by BSF staff in collaboration with our trusted network of theologians.

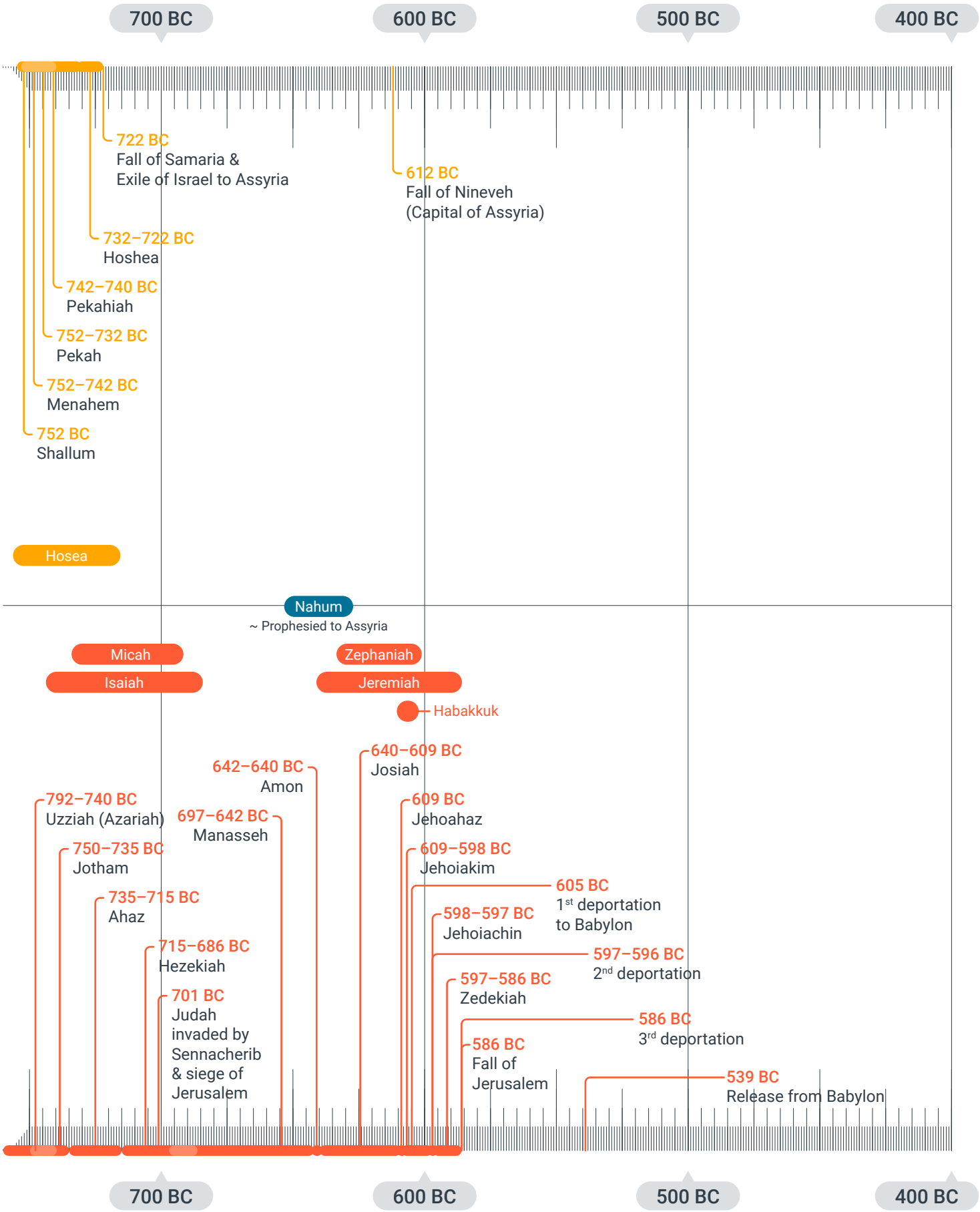
If you have come across this lesson book and are not yet a member of BSF, we welcome you to explore BSF class and online group options through our website at bsfinternational.org.

May the Lord bless you and keep you this year as you study His Word through Bible Study Fellowship.

© BSF 2022 (This material may be downloaded from mybsf.org and used by BSF class members in connection with their personal BSF class studies. It may not be otherwise reproduced without BSF's written permission.) All Scripture quotations, in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION® NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.


THE DIVIDED KINGDOM
N
0 15 30 Miles
0 15 30 Kilometers
Sidon
Zarephath
Tyre
Litani River
PHOENICIA
Damascus
Pharpar River
Dan
Lake Huleh
Hazor
ARAM
Sea of Galilee
Gath Hepher
(Jonah)
Mount Carmel
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
Yarmuk River
Shunem
Jezreel
Ramoth Gilead
Dothan
Abel Meholah
(Elisha)
Kerith Ravine
Tishbe
(Elijah)
Tirzah
Samaria
Jordan River
Shechem
Yarkon River
Jabbok River
To Nineveh
Shiloh
ISRAEL
(Northern Kingdom)
Joppa
Gilgal
Bethel
Rabbah (Amman)
AMMON
Jericho
Ekron
Anathoth
(Jeremiah)
Jerusalem
(Isaiah)
Gath
Bethlehem
Moresheth Gath
(Micah)
Tekoa
(Amos)
Hebron
Gaza
En Gedi
DEAD SEA
Arnon River
Besor Brook
Beersheba
MOAB
Kir Hareseth
PHILISTIA
JUDAH
(Southern Kingdom)
Zered River
EASTERN DESERT
Bozrah
Kadesh Barnea
EDOM
DESERT OF ZIN
(WILDERNESS OF KADESH)
Bible Study Fellowship


1100 BC
1000 BC
900 BC
800 BC
1050–1010 BC
Saul
1010–970 BC
David
970–930 BC
Solomon
930–909 BC
Jeroboam I
909–908 BC
Nadab
908–886 BC
Baasha
886–885 BC
Elah
885 BC
Zimri
885–874 BC
Omri
874–853 BC
Ahab
853-852 BC
Ahaziah
852–841 BC
Joram
841–814 BC
Jehu
814–798 BC
Jehoahaz
798–782 BC
Jehoash
793–753 BC
Jeroboam II
753 BC
Zechariah
752 BC
Shallum
Bible Study Fellowship
United Kingdom
Kingdom of Israel
Kingdom of Judah
Other
Elijah
Elisha
Amos
Hosea
Obadiah
~ Prophesied to Edom
Jonah
~ Prophesied to Assyria
970–930 BC
Solomon
1010–970 BC
David
1050–1010 BC
Saul
930–913 BC
Rehoboam
913–910 BC
Abijah
910–869 BC
Asa
872–848 BC
Jehoshaphat
853–841 BC
Jehoram
841 BC
Ahaziah
841–835 BC
Athaliah
835–796 BC
Joash
796–767 BC
Amaziah
792–740 BC
Uzziah (Azariah)
1100 BC
1000 BC
900 BC
800 BC



Dates are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION © NIV © Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.©. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Succession of Prophets and Kings

Historical Context Chart

ERA	PROPHET	PRIMARY SUBJECT NATION	REIGNING KING(S)	BIBLE NARRATIVE
Pre-Exile	Elijah	Israel	**Israel:** Ahab, Ahaziah, Joram	1 Kings 16:29 – 2 Kings 9:24
	Elisha	Israel	**Israel:** Joram, Jehu, Jehoahaz, Jehoash	2 Kings 3:1–13:25
	Obadiah	Edom	**Israel:** Joram **Judah:** Jehoram	2 Kings 3:1–8:24
	Jonah	Assyria	**Israel:** Jeroboam II **Judah:** Uzziah (Azariah)	2 Kings 14:23–15:7
	Amos	Israel	**Israel:** Jeroboam II	2 Kings 14:23-29
	Hosea	Israel	**Israel:** Jeroboam II, Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, Hoshea	2 Kings 14:23–17:41
	Isaiah	Judah	**Judah:** Uzziah (Azariah), Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh	2 Kings 15:1–21:18
	Micah	Judah	**Judah:** Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah	2 Kings 15:32–20:21
	Nahum	Assyria	**Judah:** Manasseh, Amon, Josiah	2 Kings 21:1–23:30
	Zephaniah	Judah	**Judah:** Josiah	2 Kings 22:1–23:30
	Jeremiah	Judah	**Judah:** Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah	2 Kings 22–25
	Habakkuk	Judah	**Judah:** Jehoiakim	2 Kings 23:34–24:7
Exile	Jeremiah (Lamentations)	Judah	**Fall of Jerusalem**	2 Kings 25

Bible Study Fellowship

This chart presents the biblical prophets studied in *People of the Promise: Kingdom Divided* to provide a general overview of their possible historical context. Historians hold various opinions about the exact chronology of some of the prophets; this chart offers one plausible view. While the prophesies were intended for all God's people to learn from, the Primary Subject Nation indicates which nation God primarily addresed through each prophet's ministry and writings. The Bible Narrative column references the biblical accounts of the kings' reigns. Joel is not displayed in this chart or on the timeline in this lesson book as date ranges for his prophecy differ greatly among scholars. References are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ® NIV © Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.©. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Helps for Studying the Bible at BSF

The goal of Bible study is to spend time with God and in community to know Him better and to make Him more fully known. The four-fold method of BSF – daily personal study, group discussion, lecture, study notes – follows two main principles:

- Context is key.
- Scripture interprets Scripture.

What God's Word says it means matters more than what we think or feel it means. As we apply God's truth through faith, we experience abundant life.

- Each time you read your Bible, prayerfully **surrender** yourself to God and His truth by faith.
- **Decide** that time spent with your BSF lesson is to **relate** with God and **allow** Him to accomplish His plan.
- **Focus** on God's presence with you as you study. **Practice** His truths, and grow. **Ask** others to pray for you and with you that you will **draw nearer** to Him and **be changed**. He is faithful.

Read the week's passage: "know the neighborhood." A key to proper Bible study is to know the context of the verses you read.

- What comes before and after the passage?
- Who is the original audience to whom this Scripture was written, and why?

Try to read or listen to the whole week's passage once or twice. Try different Bible translations. Your BSF teaching and notes help provide the context for each week's passages with resources for learning more.

Review the day's verses: Ask, "What are today's verses about? What is going on here?"

- Identify or write down the facts – who, what, where, when, why, how. Some of your BSF questions ask this.
- Read Bible footnotes and cross-references to help you understand how this passage fits into the whole Bible.
- Look for the sentence at the top of each day's BSF questions. It summarizes the day's verses.

Reflect on the day's verses: Ask, "What have I learned? What do today's verses mean?"

Each day's BSF questions are developed to discover truths and meaning in God's Word. Scan the questions listed for each day before you read the verses. You will find truth by exploring any passage with these foundational questions in mind:

- Is there a command, universal truth, or promise from God?
- Is there a warning to heed or an example to follow or avoid?
- Is there evidence of God's character (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit)?
- Is there a prayer I can make my own or use to pray for others or our world?
- Is there a pattern of disobedience or virtue shown by the characters?
- Is there personal application instead of thinking of how others in my life should apply it?
- Is there truth here I have not yet lived by?
- Is there a doubt, fear, or unconfessed sin I had not realized?
- Is there an encouragement for me to keep on persevering or waiting?

Respond to the day's verses: Ask, "How can I apply what I've learned? What needs to change because this is true?"

- Your answers to your BSF questions focus on what you have learned that is especially meaningful to you right where you are. Write out specific answers with expectation that you will learn even more in your group, in weekly teaching, and from other BSF resources and continued study.
- Prayerfully regard your answers as communication with and commitment to God. Never be afraid to have other questions. Be encouraged when you struggle with a passage or your answer. Growing takes time.
- Begin to live out your answers and be accountable. BSF group fellowship times are excellent opportunities to reflect on how God is growing you through the truths you are learning.

No one ever completes Bible study or runs out of questions for God. Bible study is a lifetime passion to more fully know the God who is and to learn how He loves you, all people, and the world. As we grow to know Him, we grow to love, trust, obey, honor, and enjoy Him forever. God gave the Bible for fellowship in a community of grace, growth, and praise. As you apply God's Word by faith, you will reveal the person God created you to become. You will see and love the world and people around you in His way. You will magnify God and mature in your loving commitment to Him and your compassion for people.

God's Word, His People, and His Plan

2 Timothy 3:16-17; Romans 15:4

Lecture Notes

Next step: Read Lesson Notes.

Lesson Notes

2 Timothy 3:16-17; Romans 15:4

Focus Verse

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." – 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Outline

- The Authority of the Bible – 2 Timothy 3:16-17
- The Value of the Old Testament – Romans 15:4

Engage

What demands your attention – the daily news, work, family responsibilities? A thousand concerns compete for our energy and thoughts. How do we figure out *what* matters most? The place to start is with *who* matters most – God. He not only created the world but is intimately involved with the people He created. God rules human history and has complete authority over us, whether or not we recognize that fact. God deserves our highest priority and deepest love. God wants us to know Him and allow Him to order our lives. **God has spoken to us in ways we can understand.**

God has revealed Himself to us through His Word. We study the Bible not merely to gain information, but to walk intimately with our Creator and reflect His character to an unbelieving world. Who God is and what He has spoken matters more than anything else. His worthiness and exalted status call us to humbly and earnestly seek Him. How can we do that? **The Bible helps us understand God and His highest purpose for our lives.** Will you trust God to meet you through this study?

The Authority of the Bible – 2 Timothy 3:16-17

The Proven Authenticity of Scripture

People view the Bible in different ways. Some doubt its origin. Others question its truthfulness. And some view the Bible as God's true Word. **From Genesis through Revelation, the Bible's unified theme – God's plan to restore and redeem sinful humanity – speaks to its authenticity.** Archaeological discoveries, proven scientific facts, and the historical accuracy of God's written Word also confirm its truthfulness.

© BSF 2022 (This material may be downloaded from mybsf.org and used by BSF class members in connection with their personal BSF class studies. It may not be otherwise reproduced without BSF's written permission.)

The Bible is a collection of 66 writings, composed by more than 40 Jewish and Gentile authors who were inspired by the Holy Spirit. The harmony between the unique lives and messages of the Bible's human authors attests to its divine inspiration. The endurance of the Scriptures over centuries – and despite opposition – reveals the integrity and majesty of its message. Through His Word, God reveals Himself and His work across generations and cultures to reach sinners and bring them to eternal life.

The Bible's Trustworthiness

Knowing who or what to trust seems harder than ever. Photoshopped images, internet trolls, and misrepresentations of facts make it hard to know what is real and true. How can we be certain that the Bible is worthy of our time and trust? **The reliability of the Scriptures rests on the perfect character and integrity of God Himself.** God is truth and speaks only truth.[1] He is incapable of telling a lie.[2] God spoke through the Bible's human authors: "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:20-21).

The Bible declares itself to be true and from God. However, beyond external evidence, the Holy Spirit's internal witness assures believers that the words of the Bible are true. **A heart regenerated by the Holy Spirit recognizes the power, authority, and value of God's Word.**[3] We are able to fully trust the Bible as the inspired Word of Almighty God.

The Bible's Authority in Faith and Life

How is it possible to live a life of faith in today's hostile world? God's book tells us how. **The Bible speaks with authority into a believer's life.**[4] "For 'All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.' And this is the word that was preached to you" (1 Peter 1:24-25). The ancient words of the Bible are as relevant as if written today.

The God who breathed His Word also breathes His presence into every circumstance a believer may face. God's Word provides needed wisdom, guidance, comfort, and peace as we journey through life. God's people today face situations that are strikingly familiar to those His people faced thousands of years ago. **The Bible helps us know how to walk with God in this life.**

The Practical Power of Scripture

God Speaks

God is above us in every way yet stoops to love and communicate with us. He responds to our needs in compassion and mercy. God did not leave us to flounder and figure things out on our own. He lovingly speaks into our lives through tangible words we can read and ponder. How can we fully appreciate the privilege we have to hear from God, glean truth, and find a perspective on life and eternity?

1: God is truth: John 14:6; 17:17; Revelation 21:5
2: God cannot lie: 1 Samuel 15:29; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18
3: Spirit reveals truth: John 16:15; Romans 8:16; 1 Corinthians 2:14-16; 1 Thessalonians 2:13
4: Authority of the Bible: Deuteronomy 4:2; Joshua 1:8; Isaiah 55:11; Matthew 4:4; 5:17-18; John 12:48-49; Romans 10:17

Through the Bible, God speaks to mankind's deepest and most profound questions. He explains what we need to know in order to find stability in this life. **We can never overestimate the wonder that Almighty God has given His Word to impart truth and purpose to our lives.** Through the Bible, our Creator speaks to us powerfully and intimately.

God Reveals Himself

As God speaks through His Word, He unveils the truth about who He is. God is self-existent. Nothing we are or bring to Him enlarges His greatness in any way. Yet, in mysterious amazement, He chooses to disclose Himself to us. Despite our rebellion and sinfulness, He reaches out to us. The Bible pulls back the curtain on God in ways that lead us to worship. His greatness, compassion, holiness, and too many qualities to name or understand are translated into human language so we can gaze at the God who has so loved us.

We also learn who we are before Him. God made a way for us to walk in intimate fellowship with Him. He bridged the gulf between us by sacrificing His Son, Jesus, on the cross and raising Him again in victory. **There is no greater honor than to know and worship God.**

God Establishes Truth

God – Creator and Sovereign of the universe – is marvelous in His perfection and unblemished holiness. He knows everything, understands everything, and works flawlessly to accomplish His perfect plans. **What God declares as true is absolutely true.** God is the supreme authority who has the right to draw the lines between right and wrong, good and bad, and truth and lies. In a world where truth is constantly changing and self-defined, we do well to look to our Creator. In love, God upholds what is right and true and calls us to find security on that solid foundation.

Be Ready to Listen

Our posture before God and His Word is a matter of extreme importance. We study the Bible not just to gain information, but with God's invitation to examine our own hearts. **God's Spirit will speak to us as we study His Word – exposing our sin and extending grace as He calls us to new steps of faith and obedience.** Do you come to this study prepared to grow? In the midst of the reverberating noise of the world, we must train our ears to discern God's voice. When His truths confront our pride and self-will, we need to humbly yield to His higher ways. The ways of God are most often out of step with culture but always represent His best for us.

The Value of the Old Testament – Romans 15:4

The Value of Studying History

The weight of the present and the mystique of the future can overshadow the value of the past. While some people love to study history, most of us tolerate a few required classes in school and move on as quickly as we can. The people and societies who have gone before us teach us valuable lessons.

God's Eternal Word

The Doctrine of The Bible

The Bible's value involves far more than its enduring popularity and prevailing presence through mankind's history. God's Holy Scripture remains a steadfast beacon of truth and light for people across centuries, generations, cultures, and contexts.[5] **Those who seek refuge in God, who has revealed Himself in His Word, ground their present lives on a secure foundation that gives hope for a glorious future.**[6] The Bible reveals truth about God, humankind, the way of salvation in Christ, and the course of human history.

God's Word reflects the veracity of His character. Therefore, the Bible can be trusted.[7] **While the separate accounts within the Bible teach meaningful lessons, the whole of the Bible tells one consistent and grand story: God's plan of redemption.** God promises to save the lost who trust in Him, equip them for a meaningful life, and deliver them to a glorious eternity.

In a world flooded by words and ideas, the Bible might be considered an ancient book with little modern-day relevance. Even people who claim to value Scripture can allow the noise of life to drown out God's voice in His Word. The Bible represents the Creator's well-chosen words for the people He created. Therefore, people flounder when they choose to live without the firm foundation of the Bible's unchangeable truth. This world's loudest voices cannot provide long-term stability. Lasting hope cannot be found apart from God Himself. **To fail to read, understand, and live under the authority of God and His Word is to build a life on shifting sand.**[8]

People who love and seek God hold fast to His Word. With its message of hope in Christ, the Bible reveals truth, exposes sin, infuses hope, and gives life an unshakeable purpose. Do you love God's Word? Have you experienced God's voice speaking truth and guidance into your everyday life? Studying God's Word involves so much more than onboarding information. As we read Scripture, the Bible reads us. God knows our deepest longings and speaks into our lives in tangible ways. **The Holy Spirit ignites the living, active Word of God to transform our thinking, change our appetites, and show us how to live to impact others.** Do you expect God to meet you and speak specifically to your unique challenges? Will you recognize the opportunity that God has granted you to study His very words? There is no greater privilege than building your life on God's Word, through the power of His Spirit.

For a Christian, history reveals far more than facts about the past. **Studying history allows us to trace the sovereign hand of Almighty God, who determines the course of human history.**[9] The failures and successes of individuals and nations offer instructions and warnings that we are wise to heed.[10] In every age, people face many of the same temptations, struggles, and joys. At every single

---

5: God's light in His Word: Psalm 119:105; 2 Peter 1:19
6: Foundation of God's Word: Psalm 119:14-16; Ephesians 6:17; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 4:12; 1 Peter 1:24-25
7: God's Word is true: 2 Samuel 22:31; Proverbs 30:5; John 17:17
8: Shifting sand: Matthew 7:24-27
9: Sovereign over history: Proverbs 16:9; 21:1; Daniel 4:17; Acts 17:26; Romans 13:1; Colossians 1:16-17
10: Warnings from the past: 1 Corinthians 10:11

point in time, God faithfully works to accomplish His eternal plan.[11] We stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us and should learn from their stories.

The Bible offers truth about the past, present, and future. The historical stories and people that fill this year's study offer lessons for our present lives and insights into the future God has prepared for us. **History matters because, ultimately, it is "His story" – a revelation of God and His dealings with the people He created and sent His Son, Jesus, to redeem.**

The Significance of the Old Testament

The Bible is divided into two distinct sections – the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament, or the Hebrew Scriptures, cover the beginnings of the world and God's interaction with the entirety of His creation. He called out a nation to carry His message to the world. The New Testament fulfills the shadows and promises introduced in the Old Testament. Details about Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven are explained. We also learn about God's ongoing work through His people until He comes again in glory**. From cover to cover, the Bible teaches that God provided a way for sinful people to return to an unbroken relationship with Him.**

The New Testament quotes the Old Testament hundreds of times. Understanding the Old Testament helps us to understand the New Testament and vice versa. Our understanding of the Old Testament can include familiar stories like the creation account, David and Goliath, or Israel's exodus from Egypt. However, we can fail to connect these stories to the historical context and central themes of Scripture. **The rich content woven into the less familiar parts of the Old Testament helps us understand God and His ways while offering us encouragement and hope.** In Paul's letter to the Romans, he emphasized the instructive value of the Old Testament. Romans 15:4 says, "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope."

God's Purposes and Plan of Redemption

God created the world in all its splendor and mankind in His image as the crown of His creation. Man and woman were created in God's image to be part of a humanity that stewarded the creation well and worked together.[12] The first man and woman, Adam and Eve, rejected God's authority and sinned against Him, tumbling humanity with them into a state of sinfulness and broken relationship with God.[13] Death entered creation as sin exacted a costly toll. Everyone born since that day enters this world enslaved to sin and evil desires. **Individuals, nations, and humanity at large reflect the brokenness that sin has inflicted.**

Throughout the Bible, God demonstrates His awesome holiness and lavish grace. In Genesis 3, the same chapter that records the fall of humanity into sin, God promised a Savior who would redeem sinners and crush Satan.[14] God compassionately extends mercy to sinners. He desires to reconcile people to Himself. The Old Testament documents the seemingly relentless damage of sin

---

11: God's plan: Isaiah 55:11; Romans 1:2-3; 3:21; Ephesians 3:3-6
12: Mankind's purpose: Genesis 1:26-28
13: Mankind's fall: Genesis 3:1-24; Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:10-18; 5:18-21
14: Promise of a Redeemer: Genesis 3:15

alongside the constant, gracious intervention of God. He spoke words of life and hope to individuals as His plan to redeem sinners continued to unfold.

The Bible tells God's story of Himself and His great purpose for mankind. God reveals Himself as a loving Father who sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to redeem and restore broken people. Apart from God's redemption, we remain alienated from Him because of our sin. Ultimately, God provided His written Word to lead people to faith in Jesus Christ. God the Holy Spirit illuminates Scripture to unlock our dead minds to understand God's truth.

God's Preparation of a People

This study specifically focuses on the history of one people – the nation of Israel. From all living in the world, God called one man, Abraham, to an important role in His plan. **God promised Abraham that his descendants would become a great nation through whom all of humanity would be blessed.**[15] The ultimate fulfillment of those promises culminated in the incarnation of God's own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, whose human lineage came through Abraham's family.[16] The story of this important nation helps us understand God's eternal plan for the world.

The nation of Israel has endured multiplied centuries of internal strife and external opposition. Despite this, the Israelites remain an integral part of God's plan for the world. This year, we will study a painful and tumultuous period in Israel's history. **The nation chosen by God to steward His truth, righteous standards, and the hope of salvation for the world failed dramatically and repeatedly.**[17] God gave the people of Israel His law and a sacrificial system of worship that pointed to the ultimate atoning sacrifice of His own Son. He faithfully sent His messengers – prophets – to call His people to repent and turn back to Him when they strayed into idolatry and sin.[18] As a loving Father, His higher purposes prevailed as He disciplined His children and allowed them to suffer at the hands of their enemies. To God's glory, Israel's failures could never thwart God's eternal plan.[19]

Israel was not chosen and used by God because they uniquely deserved His favor. Like this nation, our own stories similarly prove the unexplainable grace that God extends to sinners.

As we read Israel's story, we should not merely marvel at the failures of a people who should have done better. We will study kings who led well and kings who led poorly. We will watch people foolishly bow before powerless idols rather than worship and surrender to the God who tenderly called them to Himself. We will see a faithful minority stand with God and for God in the midst of troubled times. **Israel's story does not elevate the worthiness of Israel, but rather showcases the grace and faithfulness of God.**

Through the twists and turns of this nation, we will learn much about ourselves and our God. Israel was not chosen and used by God because they uniquely deserved His favor.[20] Like this nation, our own stories similarly prove the unexplainable grace that God extends to sinners. **We learn from Israel's history because God's work in His people holds value for our lives today.** Israel's story promises to impact your life and reveal powerful truth about your heavenly Father.

15: Abraham called: Genesis 12:1-5; Hebrews 11:8-12
16: Jesus' lineage: Matthew 1:1-16; Luke 3:23-38
17: Israel's privileges: Romans 3:1-2
18: Prophets sent: Acts 7:51-53; Hebrews 1:1; James 5:10; 2 Peter 3:2
19: Never thwarted: Isaiah 14:26-27; Romans 9:6; 11:1-2
20: God's favor on Israel: Deuteronomy 7:6-9

God's Promise of a Savior

Perhaps the most beautiful and life-giving thread of the Old Testament is the consistent promise and expectation that God would send a Savior to pay the price of sin and restore an undeserving people to a vibrant new life with God.[21] **This steadfast beacon of hope shines brightly from Genesis to Malachi, even though people did not understand everything prophesied about the coming Messiah.**[22] Before Jesus came, believers lived by faith in God's promises.[23] Then God sent His own Son into the world as the supreme expression of His love for people.[24]

God has one plan of salvation, and that plan centers around the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The sometimes-veiled promises of the Old Testament exploded into magnificent reality when the Son of God entered the human world. Many details about Jesus were foretold in the Old Testament.[25] 2 Corinthians 1:20 says, "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through Him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God."

God rules sovereignly, judges perfectly, and saves mercifully. We study God's Word to understand truth that grounds our faith as we live in this world. **The Bible helps us understand God and His highest purpose for our lives.** We learn to know and walk with God Himself. There is no greater privilege.

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Through the Bible, God lovingly and powerfully reveals Himself and His truth to the people He created. God's words stand apart from anything else we read or think about. Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." The Holy Spirit causes the words of Scripture to come to life and to convey truth to those who read, understand, and apply its teaching. Approach this study of the Bible with gratitude, reverence, expectancy, and humility. The Holy Scriptures have authority over us because they are the very words of the God who created us. Only He can rightfully establish what is true and good. We can safely build our lives and find unshakeable hope as we absorb the treasures God has prepared for us in His Word.

People living in the modern world have much to gain by studying the Old Testament. Far more than dusty stories from long ago, the pages of the Old Testament reveal God's sovereign hand over human history. **The God who orchestrated the past controls the present and the future.** Israel's ups and downs teach us much about human failure and God's faithfulness. Beyond a historical account, the Old Testament reveals God's plan to redeem mankind. Like a drumroll anticipating a musical crescendo, the Old Testament beautifully points to and prepares the way for the coming Savior, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. God is glorified and our faith is fortified by knowing God as He has revealed Himself and by rejoicing in His eternal plan of redemption.

21: Restored life: John 17:3
22: Jesus and the Old Testament: Luke 24:26-27, 44
23: Faith: John 8:56; Hebrews 11:13-16, 39-40
24: Sent by the Father: 1 John 4:14
25: Prophecies of Messiah: Psalm 22; Isaiah 7:14; 53; Micah 5:2; Zechariah 9:9

Apply It

The majority of people today do not look to the Bible as the source of truth and their foundation for life. Perhaps you have joined this Bible study with valid questions about God and the Bible. How can you be sure this book is trustworthy or has any practical impact on your life? Whether you come as a seasoned Bible student or someone with a lot of unanswered questions, approach this study with an open heart and mind. **God is big enough for your questions and does not turn away from us when we are confused.** Before each lesson, pray and ask God to teach you what He wants you to learn. You will walk through these lessons enfolded in a group of people – each one on some kind of a journey. Learn together and listen to one another. Embrace the opportunity to expand your thinking and spiritual growth. Will you trust that God has brought you to this place and this study at this particular season in your life's journey?

People who have gone before us faced uncertain times, just as we often do in today's world. When you look back over your own life, can you trace how God's hand has led you through painful circumstances and even your own mistakes? In the same way, studying Old Testament history offers encouraging and stabilizing lessons for us. God is in control when life seems out of control. God's purposes prevail despite human failure. **Recounting God's sovereignty over past history brings security and peace to your life now and in the unseen future.** What is your biggest challenge today? What is your greatest concern about tomorrow? Will you trust that God – who created the world – can handle your life? Approach these old stories expecting new insights and powerful life-changing truth.

The Bible contains a lot of important information – and so much more than that. Almighty God, who is infinitely beyond us, has spoken to us. He has recorded what we need most to know. **God has translated eternal truth into human language.** His Spirit opens our minds and hearts to desire and understand truth that exceeds human intellect alone. While unanswered questions remain about what He has not clearly revealed, what we do know with certainty is more than enough. Our faith can grasp what our minds cannot fully fathom. Do you expect the God of eternity to speak to you through His Word? As you yield yourself to God and His amazing revelation, will you allow Him to shape your thoughts and reorder your world? God knows you intimately. He knows how you think and what you need. Will you trust Him as you approach His Word this year?

All Scripture quotations, in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ® NIV ®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica Inc.®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

The Nation of Israel and the Plan of God

Genesis–Malachi

Lesson Questions

First Day: Read Introduction Lesson Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What drew you to BSF this year?

2. From the notes, what question sparked your interest about God or the Bible that you hope will be explored or answered this year?

3. What stood out to you in the lecture from last week?

© BSF 2022 (This material may be downloaded from mybsf.org and used by BSF class members in connection with their personal BSF class studies. It may not be otherwise reproduced without BSF's written permission.)

Second Day: Read Psalm 19:7-11; 119:160 and John 6:63; 17:17.

The Bible declares important truth to humanity and tells one grand story. Note: These questions are designed to prepare your group to study God's Word and Israel's history. Lesson 1 Notes provide a review of the Old Testament and set the stage for our upcoming study. If you are new to the Bible, be patient with yourself and expect that your group discussion will help you answer the questions each week.

4. a. What purpose does the Bible serve for humanity (see Psalm 19)?

   b. How have you seen the Bible fulfill its divine purpose in your life?

5. a. The Bible tells one overarching story. The following four concepts are revealed throughout God's Word. Briefly tell what you know about each major theme of the Bible. (You are in the right place to learn and grow along with your group if this is new to you!)

   Creation

   Rebellion

   Redemption

   Restoration

   b. In your own words, state the main message of the entire Bible in one sentence.

6. David ended Psalm 19 with a prayer for his life. Write down your prayer for this year.

Third Day: Read Luke 24:13-49 and Romans 15:4.

The Old and New Testament together reveal God's wisdom and plan for His people.

7. Jesus quoted the Old Testament nearly 100 times.

   a. Share one example where Jesus quoted the Old Testament from the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John.

   b. What does this reveal about the Old Testament and its importance?

8. How do you see the Old Testament fulfilled in the New Testament(see Luke 24:13-49)?

9. What excites or intimidates you about studying the Old Testament?

Fourth Day: Read Isaiah 5:1-7; Acts 7:1-53; and 1 Corinthians 10:1-13.

The nation of Israel plays an important role in God's plan for humankind.

10. How does God describe His relationship with Israel (see Isaiah 5:1-7)?

11. Read and meditate on this week's Focus Verse, Isaiah 41:8-9. What thoughts or questions emerge as you think about these verses?

12. a. How does Stephen summarize Israel's history in Acts 7? What historical events does he emphasize?

b. How might Israel's story of successes and failures apply to life in today's world (see 1 Corinthians 10:1-13)?

Fifth Day: Read 1 Kings 11.

Our study this year steps into Israel's story at the end of the reign of King Solomon.

13. Describe the leadership challenges and spiritual condition of Israel near the end of Solomon's reign.

14. What does the prophecy in verses 29-39 reveal about the future?

15. In what ways does this scenario seem relevant to our world today?

16. How does God use times of transition to accomplish His purposes? How has He done this in your life?

Sixth Day: Read Isaiah 58:9.

Israel's story matters to believers today.

17. What is the biggest challenge or opportunity you face this year as we approach this study? How can your group pray for you?

No homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders

Lecture Notes

Next step: Read Lesson Notes.

Lesson Notes

Genesis–Malachi

Focus Verse

"But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend, I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, 'You are my servant'; I have chosen you and have not rejected you." – Isaiah 41:8-9

Outline

- Israel's Roots
- Israel's Kings
- Israel's Exile

Engage

Have you ever gazed down at the world below from an airplane window or a high vista? There are unique features of the landscape that we fail to notice from below. An elevated view magnifies the vastness of a mountain range or the intense blue of the ocean. **Soaking in the big picture view is worth the time and effort before focusing on the details.**

As we prepare to study a specific era in Israel's colorful history, we are well served to begin with a flyover of the landscape of the Old Testament. God accomplishes His sovereign plan and eternal purposes as He orchestrates history. Israel's part in God's grand plan provides a needed backdrop for our coming study. Both Israel's glorious triumphs and astounding failures reveal God's truth. **Israel's story matters to believers today.** Are you ready for a quick look at the big picture?

Israel's Roots

God, the World, and His People – The Pentateuch

Pentateuch is the Greek word for "five books" or "five scrolls." These first five books of the Old Testament comprise the Hebrew Torah, which is Hebrew for "Law" or "Instruction." God tells His story from the beginning. **From Genesis through Deuteronomy, God displays His creative handiwork through many "firsts" in a brand-new world.** As God's relationship with humankind grows, He demonstrates His great love and chooses a people as His very own. We meet His people from Adam and Eve to Moses and Joshua. And through it all, we see God's mighty hand.

The Truth About God

The main character in Israel's story is God. Israel's history begins with and revolves around God, who reveals many wonderful things about His Person and ways. God's protection, power, and provision for His people resonate clearly. His heart to relate to the people He created and redeem them from their sin echoes throughout the Old Testament. There is much to learn about God in Israel's story.

The Beginnings of the World – Genesis 1–11

Genesis reveals God's vastness as He spoke and formed the universe. God made Adam and Eve in His image and breathed life into them. They were placed in a beautiful garden where they enjoyed sweet fellowship with their Creator and one another. This represents the life God intends for us.[1] Their fall into sin reaped devastating effects on all humankind,[2] but God intervened with His provision of a sacrifice and plan of redemption.[3] God sought to restore what sin had damaged.

God's purposes continued to unfold. In mercy, God rescued Noah and his family as water exploded from the earth below and the skies above.[4] After the Flood, the people of the earth sought to remain together in defiance of God's command to fill the earth. At the Tower of Babel, God scattered them and confused their languages, demonstrating His purposeful control over humankind.[5]

The Calling of a People – Genesis 12–Deuteronomy

From all the people of the earth, God chose one man, Abraham, and promised that his descendants would become a great nation and bless the entire world.[6] In faith, Abraham left his homeland and set out for Canaan, the land God promised to him. God's protection and provision permeate Abraham's story. God established His covenant with Abraham, and His plan for the Israelite people becomes clearer as the story progresses. **Ultimately, all nations on earth will be blessed through Abraham's promised descendant, Jesus Christ.**

By God's hand, Abraham and his wife, Sarah, miraculously conceived their son, Isaac, in their old age.[7] **God's covenant promises were passed through succeeding generations.** Isaac's son Jacob, whom God renamed Israel, had 12 sons whose families became the 12 tribes of Israel. Israel's founding fathers, often referred to as the patriarchs, failed in many ways. God's faithfulness to His chosen people through multiplying generations remains a constant thread in Israel's history.

God moved His people to Egypt where they multiplied greatly. From the families of Jacob's 12 sons, they were cemented into a nation. **God called Moses to rescue His people from 400 years of bondage in Egypt.** Their 40-year journey in the wilderness was fraught with bitter grumbling against God, the very One who provided for their every need.[8] Setting His people apart from all others, God gave Moses the gift of His law and a glorious vision of His character.[9] God waited to fulfill His promise to bring Israel into the land of Canaan until all the rebellious generation who grumbled in the wilderness had died.[10]

1: Creation: Genesis 1–2
2: Fall into sin: Genesis 3:1-19
3: Promise of redemption: Genesis 3:15, 21-23
4: The Flood: Genesis 6:9–9:17
5: Tower of Babel: Genesis 11
6: Abraham's call: Genesis 12:1-5
7: Isaac's birth: Genesis 21:1-7
8: Rebellion and provisions: Exodus 15–17
9: God's gifts to Moses: Exodus 20; 34
10: Rebellious generation: Deuteronomy 2:14-15

The Conquest of Canaan – Joshua and Judges

After Moses' death,[11] God raised up Joshua, a valiant warrior, to lead the Israelites to possess the Promised Land. The Lord alone gave His people success as they conquered Canaan. They did this with no allies and little training in battle. Even though God's unwavering promise declared Canaan as their homeland, inhabiting the land required courage, faith, and many battles. **God's people experienced both victories and struggles as God's promise became their reality.**[12] The conquest of Canaan fulfilled prophecy, revealed the power of God,[13] and carried out God's judgment on the sinful inhabitants of the land.[14] God confirmed His covenant with His people[15] and established them in the territory He had prepared for them. The tribes of Israel were assigned to specific areas in Canaan according to God's design.[16]

God ordained Israel as His instrument to pass His truth and message of salvation to the world. Joshua's final charge to the Israelites in Joshua 24:14-16 offered a clear call for their unified and singular commitment to God. "Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors serve beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

Joshua's exhortation prepared the Israelites to enter Canaan – a land steeped in idolatry. This environment challenged their commitment to worship and obey God alone. The book of Judges describes Israel's repeated cycles of disobedience and idolatry. God's people failed to fully drive the Canaanites from the land.[17] They also intermarried with the idolatrous Canaanites, despite God's warnings.[18] **God appointed judges during this dark period in Israel's history to call the Israelites from their waywardness.**[19] God faithfully sought to preserve His people and uphold the purpose He had ordained for them.

Israel's Kings

Upon settling in the Promised Land, much of Israel's story revolves around a succession of kings and the turbulent response of God's people. This era in Israel's history divides into two distinct sections. **First, the Israelites were united as one people in one kingdom through the reigns of three kings: Saul, David, and Solomon.** A previous BSF study, *People of the Promised Land,* focused on these years.

After Solomon's death, Israel divided into two distinct kingdoms, Israel and Judah. Our study this year focuses on this period of Israel's history. A review of the spiritual and political influences leading up to Israel's divided kingdom will help provide needed context for this year's study. In addition to the references below, 1 and 2 Chronicles add details and confirm many of the accounts within the narrative of 1 and 2 Kings.

11: Moses' death: Deuteronomy 34
12: Victories and struggles: Joshua 1:1-6; 3:15-17; 6:20; 10:12-14
13: God's power revealed: Joshua 2:8-11
14: Judgment of Canaanites: Genesis 15:16; Leviticus 18:24-30
15: Covenant: Joshua 8:30-35; 24:1-25
16: Allotment of Canaan: Joshua 13–21
17: Failure to remove Canaanites: Judges 1:19-21
18: Intermarriage: Judges 3:5-6
19: Judges: Judges 1–21

Discovering Your Highest Purpose

The Doctrine of Humanity: Creation and Purpose

God had a purpose for Israel. He entrusted this nation with many spiritual privileges and experiences of His power.[20] They received God's law and His appointed leaders. These chosen people had the privilege of knowing who God was. He called the Israelites to carry His message to the world. Israel experienced their highest and best purpose as a nation when they yielded to God and sought Him wholeheartedly.

Similarly, God made all people in His image and designed them for eternal fellowship with Him.[21] An inner sense of our eternality and desire for a purpose beyond merely surviving daily life rises from the very core of our beings.[22] Only God can satisfy the deepest yearnings of the human heart.[23] Sin broke our fellowship with God and represents mankind's greatest tragedy. Through Christ, our fellowship with God and our highest purpose are restored. Life's most enduring treasure is found in glorifying God and walking with Him.

People seek happiness and fulfillment in many different ways. The flimsy substitutes this world offers such as power, prestige, wealth, career, comfort, and entertainment cannot truly satisfy the human soul. Only God can do that. To live life failing to acknowledge God and yield to Him is to miss the purpose for which you were created. No one can achieve true fulfillment in life by avoiding or rejecting their Creator.

Life's highest honor is to seek and walk with God. The benefits of knowing God are not reserved for heaven but meant to be experienced in the ordinary moments of everyday life. God equips every believer to flourish in this life and for eternity.[24] Fresh experiences of God's grace and provision point to God's power and compassion. Our increasing surrender to God proves His faithfulness and sufficiency. Trusting Him with circumstances beyond human solutions brings comfort and overcomes fear. A Christian can thrive spiritually even in the midst of intense suffering.[25] Resiliency in life comes when your daily experience fulfills the purpose for which you were created. The wisest and most fulfilling pursuit of your life is to know and walk with God. Only God can provide safe harbor in this life and for eternity.

The United Kingdom – 1 Samuel 8–1 Kings 11

Three Kings – Saul, David, and Solomon

The final verse of the book of Judges summarizes the spiritual decline of God's people, "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit." Israel had no human king to protect the people and

---

20: Israel's blessings: Isaiah 43:1-7; Romans 3:1-2; 9:4-5
21: Mankind's purpose: Genesis 1:27; Acts 17:24-28; 1 Corinthians 1:9; Colossians 1:16; 1 John 1:1-7
22: Mankind's eternal awareness: Ecclesiastes 3:11; Romans 2:15
23: Desire for God: Psalm 73:25
24: Flourishing: Psalm 1:1-3; 92:12-13; Proverbs 11:28
25: Thriving in suffering: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; Philippians 3:7-11; 1 Peter 3:14

administer justice. They also did not recognize and obey God as the one true King. By asking for a human king, the Israelites desired to be like other nations. This request ultimately demonstrated their rejection of God as their King.[26] **At God's direction and with stated warnings, Israel's last judge, Samuel, anointed Israel's first king, Saul**.[27]

Saul was the picture-perfect king by human standards.[28] **Despite outward advantages, Saul was unfaithful to God and the kingship eventually was removed from him.**[29] God's prophet Samuel deeply mourned Saul's failures, but God directed Samuel to anoint another king to succeed Saul.[30]

David, a shepherd boy from the family of Jesse, was anointed as Israel's next king. This time, God's selection of a king incorporated far more than physical attributes. In 1 Samuel 16:7, God told Samuel, "... The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." David was anointed king but did not take the throne for many years. God used a prolonged period of David fleeing from a jealous Saul to prepare David's heart for his God-given mission.[31] Though David remained absolutely certain of everything God promised, he had to wait to experience the fulfillment of God's promises. Saul's rebellion against God increased and his life ended tragically. Only then did David take Israel's throne.

The nation thrived with David as king.[32] A warrior and a leader, David loved God deeply and led well, but he also sinned greatly. His epic failure – adultery and murder – were not beyond God's grace.[33] David repented when confronted and accepted the consequences of his sin.[34] **Despite David's failings, God mightily empowered him as king and established an eternal covenant with him.**[35] David's royal line would continue eternally; the promised Messiah would come as Israel's ultimate King through his lineage.[36] God's holy character, not human faithfulness, secures His promises.

God graciously chose David's son Solomon as Israel's next king.[37] Solomon was incredibly intelligent and gifted. He sought and was granted incredible wisdom from God.[38] The temple in Jerusalem, with its amazing splendor, was constructed during Solomon's reign, according to the plans prepared by King David.[39] **Despite his giftedness and privileges, Solomon directly disobeyed God's instructions by accumulating wives and possessions which ultimately turned his heart from full devotion to God.**[40] Solomon's story is a sad one as he failed to steward God's blessings and his position honorably. We pick up our study this year after Solomon's death as turmoil within the kingdom of Israel erupted into division.

Wisdom Literature

Along with the historical narrative detailing the reigns of Israel's first three kings, the Bible also includes beautiful and well-loved writings written during this period of Israel's history. The

---

26: Desire for a king: 1 Samuel 8
27: Saul anointed: 1 Samuel 10
28: Saul's physical qualifications: 1 Samuel 9:1-2
29: Saul rejected: 1 Samuel 15:10-11, 35
30: Samuel's lament: 1 Samuel 16:1-2
31: David and Saul: 1 Samuel 16:14–31:13
32: David as king: 2 Samuel 2–10
33: David's sin: 2 Samuel 11
34: David's repentance: 2 Samuel 12:11-23; Psalm 32; 51
35: Davidic covenant: 2 Samuel 7
36: Jesus from David's lineage: Matthew 1:1-17
37: David's son, Solomon: 1 Kings 1:28–2:46
38: Solomon's wisdom: 1 Kings 3; 10:1-13
39: Temple: 1 Kings 6
40: Solomon's wealth and wives: 1 Kings 7:1-12; 10:14–11:13

books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs are commonly grouped together. These books contain Hebrew poetry and practical instruction for God's people.

These important books add depth and color to the historical account of God's people, Israel. Job contains a poignant story of a faithful man and important spiritual lessons about human suffering and God's sovereignty. David wrote as many as 73 of the 150 Psalms. A collection of poetry, songs and writings, David's psalms reflect his deep love for God and express his honest laments. The Psalms continue to draw people's hearts to God today. Solomon's wisdom and his inner turmoil are reflected in Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs. **The Bible does not merely relay information; God's Word reveals God, speaks to the depths of the human soul, and expresses the human experience with beauty and dignity.**

The Divided Kingdom – 1 Kings 12–2 Kings 25

This year's study picks up Israel's story as the monarchy seems to erode to anarchy. A divided nation struggles and sins repeatedly. A few good kings who sought God are sprinkled among the many who did not. Yet through it all, God continued to call His people to Himself, despite their repeated failures.

Kings and Kingdoms

Adversaries without and division within Israel represented both God's prophesied discipline and Israel's path forward.[41] The nation divided. Two separate kingdoms emerged: Israel and Judah.

Solomon's son Rehoboam was in line to become king. Disunity within Israel over excessive taxation eventually led Israel's ten northern tribes to revolt.[42] **They united as a separate kingdom under Jeroboam I, who led them into apostasy and idol worship.**[43] A succession of evil kings and spiritual decline followed as the people turned from God. Assyria eventually conquered and deported the northern kingdom as an act of God's judgment.[44]

Only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin remained loyal to Rehoboam. The recorded history of the kingdom of Judah includes kings who turned away from God while some brought spiritual reformation and revival. Ultimately, the people failed to follow God. Judgment then fell on Judah, as the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and took the people into captivity.[45]

Prophets and Warnings

God faithfully witnessed to His people through this difficult period in Israel's history. He sent prophets who warned the people and called them to repentance. **Though the historical narrative of this period in Israel's history is somewhat bleak, we find encouragement in the words God spoke through His prophets.** The prophetic writings associated with this era in Israel's history contain God's declarations to His people and their enemies while resonating with hope regarding the glorious future God has prepared.

41: Division predicted: 1 Kings 11:11-13
42: Revolt under Jeroboam I: 1 Kings 12:1-24; 2 Chronicles 10
43: Idolatry under Jeroboam: 1 Kings 12:26-33
44: Israel and Assyria: 2 Kings 17:7-23
45: Judah's fall: 2 Kings 25:1-21; 2 Chronicles 36:15-21; Jeremiah 52:1-30

This year, we will look at writings within the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, and Habakkuk. The rich messages from these prophets also offer hope for us today. Understanding how, when, through whom, and what God spoke helps enlarge our grasp of God's story of redemption and His love for rebellious people. **Every word in the Bible has value for our lives.**

Israel's Exile

Note: This year's study ends with both kingdoms of Israel and Judah in exile. This section of the notes offers a brief overview of Israel's history from the exile through the end of the Old Testament. These events and the prophets that spoke for God during this era will be the focus of a future BSF study.

Discipline and Deportation

A casual observer might conclude that God was finished with Israel as they remained enslaved, abused, and removed from their homeland. **However, God's purposes prevailed even through this painful period in Israel's history.** As Israel was dispersed to Assyria, pagan people inhabited the abandoned land and mingled the worship of the true God with idolatry. The people of Judah, who suffered waves of deportation to Babylon, were forced to live in a foreign land among people who worshiped pagan gods.

God's well-aimed discipline offers evidence of His enduring love. Sometimes God allows His people to suffer to purify their faith, uphold His unchangeable truth, and accomplish His purposes. **God does not accomplish His plans in the human realm through easy circumstances and outward success.** Israel's story proves that God's plans prevail. Seeming defeat paves the way for His deliverance.

A Call Home

God's People in Exile

God did not forsake His people, despite their sin. The Old Testament tells how God preserved His people through the difficult years of exile under their enemies. God's sovereign hand accomplished His grander purposes. He directed the decrees of ungodly kings in distant lands. He mobilized leaders among His people to take them into the next chapter of their story. There is no doubt that God sets the times, places, and impact of human leaders and world history.[46] Eventually, God led a remnant of His people back to the Promised Land to rebuild the temple and reinhabit the land God gave them.

God's Faithfulness to His People

The books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi belong to this period in Israel's history. **God's faithfulness to exiles shines light in the midst of dark times.** God moved in the hearts of pagan kings *and* godly leaders. God spoke with words of

---

46: God's control of history: Proverbs 16:9; Daniel 2:21; John 19:11; Acts 17:26; Romans 13:1-2

hope and renewed promises. He offered strategic guidance to His people. Courageous leaders with steadfast commitment to hard work and God's purposes emerged to rebuild what sin and Israel's enemies had destroyed. We serve and worship the God who rebuilds and redeems! These accounts inspire us and offer hope.

So often, God appears to be losing, and it seems like Satan is winning. Israel's story, our world, and our circumstances can feel desperately out of control. Yet, for God's child, our hope never rests on outward circumstances. The God who created the world controls its destiny. God's people rest firmly in His hands. **Israel's story matters to believers today.** Are you ready to learn from what God has done on behalf of His people? Where will God lead you this year?

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

A big picture view of the Old Testament's cohesive storyline helps us see God's vastness alongside His deep love for people. His unfolding plan to redeem mankind sets the backdrop for our study of a specific period in Israel's history. Creation, God's choice of Abraham, and the formation of Israel as a nation define the landscape on which we will walk. There is much to learn within the story of God's people. **Israel's history often exposes an unfaithful people, but always reveals a faithful God.**

Next week's lesson picks up Israel's story after the disappointing reign of Solomon. Political turmoil and spiritual decline set the stage for division within Israel. **This year's study focuses on the stories of multiple kings ruling two kingdoms: Israel and Judah.** We will ride the roller coaster with these two kingdoms as their steady decline leads to God's judgment of both kingdoms at the hands of enemy nations.

No matter where you live, the world looks uncertain. Political strife, disappointing leaders, and rising conflict abound. **The God who orchestrated Israel's history still reigns.** His sovereignty and faithfulness, despite human failure, provide a steady anchor for your life. Together, we will set our gaze on God.

Apply It

Human history and daily life often reveal cycles of success and failure. The people of Israel repeatedly turned from God, faced His discipline, and then repented. While we want to steadily move toward God and forward in spiritual growth, our walk with Him can also have ups and downs. Because we are weak and life is hard, we often face desperate moments when God softens our hearts to cry out to Him. Complacency with personal sin, difficult decisions, declining health, and many other factors repeatedly reveal both our need for God and His faithfulness. **Just as He did for Israel, God weaves His redemptive purposes into the hills and valleys of our lives.** Recount your history with God. As you look back, how has God used hard things to bring spiritual growth? In what specific ways can you point to God's sovereign hand and unrelenting faithfulness? God's purposes prevail. How do you see His redemptive purposes at work in the hardest thing you face today?

Leaders influence followers. Israel's story confirms the overwhelming impact of leaders, whether good or bad. In some way, you are also a leader. Leadership involves far more than political power and a public presence. Everyone leads someone. You influence others in quiet and gentle ways as you humbly walk with God through your life. God may have called you to serve others in your church or community. By God's design, He intentionally places believers in circles of influence uniquely designed for their role in His body, the Church. **In every case, your personal walk with God determines the strength of your leadership.** We cannot lead others where we have not been. How does your private walk with God impact the ways you influence others? In what ways can you prepare yourself to lead in the way God has designed for you? Will you trust the Holy Spirit to tell you when to step up and speak up?

The most solid thing in an uncertain world is God Himself. The fact that God controls history comforts us. Israel's story helps us understand God's heart. The ways that He actively seeks to reveal Himself and redeem what sin has destroyed encourages us. The realities that God reveals through His Word, His Spirit, and His people amaze us. God spoke and formed the world from nothing. He spoke through His prophets and continues to speak through His Son and the Holy Spirit. When you rise in the morning, pillow your head at night, and in every moment in between, do you actively listen for God's voice? As you enter this study, do you expect God to speak into the details of your life? God, give us ears poised to hear your voice!

All Scripture quotations, in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ® NIV ®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica Inc.®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Divided Kingdom: Rehoboam and Jeroboam

1 Kings 11–14; 2 Chronicles 10–12

Lesson Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 1 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the notes help you recognize God's activity in your life this week?

2. What from the lecture helped you understand and value God's sovereign control over history and your life?

Second Day: Read 1 Kings 11.

Solomon ignored God's warnings and brought God's judgment upon his kingdom.

3. a. In what specific ways did Solomon ignore God's warnings?

© BSF 2022 (This material may be downloaded from mybsf.org and used by BSF class members in connection with their personal BSF class studies. It may not be otherwise reproduced without BSF's written permission.)

b. Why were these compromises so serious, and what were the results?

4. What prophecy was given to Jeroboam, Solomon's servant?

5. How might you be tolerating compromise in your life that is drawing your affection away from God?

Third Day: Read 1 Kings 12:1-24 and 2 Chronicles 10.

Solomon's son Rehoboam alienated the Israelites, and his kingdom was divided.

6. a. In what specific ways did Rehoboam exercise poor discernment and leadership?

   b. How do you see both the consequences of his choices and God's sovereign plan at work?

   c. In what way has God used the consequences of your poor choices or sin in a redemptive way in your life?

7. a. How were Israel's tribes divided as Rehoboam's kingdom split into two separate kingdoms?

   b. Why is this division significant in Israel's history and God's redemptive plan (see Genesis 49:10 and Matthew 1:2-16)?

Fourth Day: Read 1 Kings 12:25–14:20.

Jeroboam led Israel into flagrant idolatry, spurned God's prophets, and awaited destruction.

8. a. What did Jeroboam fear?

   b. Identify what you most fear. How might this fear be influencing your decisions?

   c. Read 2 Timothy 1:7 and 1 John 4:18. How do these verses encourage you?

9. Describe the multiple ways Jeroboam defiled the purity of worship God intended for His people.

10. a. Tell about Jeroboam's two encounters with prophets in 1 Kings 13–14.

    b. In what ways do these incidents reveal both Jeroboam's continued resistance and God's mercy to him?

11. How have you experienced God's merciful persistence to call you to Himself?

Fifth Day: Read 1 Kings 14:21-31 and 2 Chronicles 11:5–12:16.

Judah sinned against God and was attacked by Egypt.

12. In what ways do you see both faithfulness and compromise within Rehoboam's kingdom?

13. How did God use the attack from Egypt in Rehoboam's life?

14. How would you summarize Rehoboam's reign as king?

Sixth Day: Review 1 Kings 11–14 and 2 Chronicles 10–12.

Rejecting God and choosing sin brings bitter consequences.

15. What did you learn about God from these chapters? How can your group pray for you in light of this truth?

No homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders

Lecture Notes

Next step: Read Lesson Notes.

Lesson Notes

1 Kings 11–14; 2 Chronicles 10–12

Focus Verse

"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." – 1 John 1:8-9

Outline

- Deterioration Within Solomon's Kingdom – 1 Kings 11
- Division Into Two Kingdoms – 1 Kings 12:1-24; 2 Chronicles 10:1–12:12
- Decline in Both Kingdoms – 1 Kings 12:25–14:31; 2 Chronicles 12:13-16

Engage

How do you explain the downward spiral toward brokenness and destruction so often evident in society, in individual lives, and even within our own hearts? Three key words in this week's lesson paint a dismal picture: deterioration, division, and decline. Israel's story reveals the long-term and short-term impacts of rejecting God. **Sin so corrupts people's hearts and appetites that they willingly choose a destructive path, often ignoring God's calls to repentance and restoration.** God certainly wants better than this for us. The reality of the ruin faced by those who reject God highlights the only hope for humanity and for us as individuals – seeking and following God.

God allows people to experience the folly of rejecting Him. The sad course of Israel's history offers a stark warning as well as a resounding call to find refuge and hope in God alone. When we surrender to God, He uses even sin's consequences for our good. As humans, we experience both external pressure in the world and a very real internal battle with our own sinful desires. **Rejecting God and choosing sin brings bitter consequences.** Only when we seek God can we truly flourish in this life. Will you approach this lesson prepared to recognize sin's traps and walk with God wholeheartedly?

Deterioration Within Solomon's Kingdom – 1 Kings 11

Solomon's Failures – 11:1-13

God greatly gifted Solomon with wisdom and wealth. **Despite God's grace, Solomon committed tragic sin by turning toward worldliness and away from God**. Old Testament Law specifically

forbade kings from multiple marriages and accumulating gold and silver.[1] Despite God's direct warning, Solomon intermarried with women from many nations, including Pharoah's daughter. He built high places to accommodate the idolatry of his 700 wives and 300 concubines and joined them in worship. This idol worship went beyond merely bowing down before images and involved many sinful practices. Solomon's compromises reaped tragic results.

Solomon faced severe judgment because he ignored God's commands. God announced that Solomon's kingdom would be torn away from him, but not during his lifetime for the sake of David and Jerusalem. Ten of Israel's twelve tribes would be ripped away from Solomon's son. Solomon's bitter punishment serves as a warning that God is the only source of true wisdom and what He has decreed is certain. He alone is worthy of worship.

God actively pursued a relationship with Solomon. God appeared to him twice and showered Solomon with abundant blessings.[2] Unheeded warnings and disobedience brought God's just punishment. God speaks to us through His Word. He lovingly warns us and openly reveals His commands for our lives. **Those who turn away from God and disobey His commands are subject to sin's consequences – even today.** Sometimes those consequences are long-term and only surface down the road, impacting generations to come.

Solomon's Foes – 11:14-40

Enemies Without – 11:14-25

God raised up external adversaries against Solomon. Hadad was from Edom, a longtime enemy of Israel and a nation descended from Esau.[3] When he was a young boy, Hadad's father and all of Edom's men were struck down by David's commander Joab.[4] Hadad had escaped to Egypt and was taken in by Pharoah, who provided for his every need. The ancient hostility between Israel and Edom still churned in Hadad's heart. When he heard that David and Joab had died, Hadad requested Pharaoh's permission to return to his home country to oppose Solomon.

God raised up another enemy against Solomon – Rezon from Zobah. Rezon led a band of rebels to Damascus. Solomon regained control but was unable to drive these enemies out of the territory. Rezon remained an adversary as long as Solomon lived. **God disciplined Solomon through the enemies He raised against him.**

Enemies Within – 11:26-40

God also raised up an adversary within Solomon's own kingdom. As a young man, Jeroboam had demonstrated faithfulness in his work and was promoted to oversee labor forces. The prophet Ahijah met Jeroboam while he was traveling in the country and revealed God's plan with a visual display. The prophet tore his cloak into 12 pieces, representing the 12 tribes of Israel. He gave 10 of the pieces to Jeroboam to signify the 10 tribes over which he would rule. Only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin would remain with Solomon's kingdom, while all others would follow Jeroboam. **In response to his sin and according to God's Word, Solomon's kingdom would be split apart from within.**

1: God's Law: Deuteronomy 17:14-20
2: God appeared to Solomon: 1 Kings 3:4-15; 9:2-9; 2 Chronicles 1:7-12; 7:11-22
3: Esau: Genesis 25:19-34; 36
4: Defeat of Edom: 2 Samuel 8:13-14; 1 Chronicles 18:12-13; Psalm 60

Divine prophecy declared Jeroboam's rise to power, but God also offered him an opportunity to turn to Him in faith and obedience. Jeroboam received a conditional promise similar to the unconditional promise received by David.[5] If Jeroboam remained faithful, God would bless him and establish his kingdom. Ahijah's prophecy came to pass, just as he declared. **Everything God promises is absolutely certain.** God upholds the truth of His Word in every way and throughout all time. Unfortunately, Jeroboam had little regard for God or His call to faithfulness. Despite clear evidence of God's power and purposes, Jeroboam rejected God and sought his own way.

Solomon's Finale – 11:41-43

Scripture remains silent about the remainder of Solomon's life. Solomon died and received an honorable burial. His son Rehoboam succeeded him as king. Solomon's reign began with his fire for the Lord but ended with hardly a flicker among forsaken embers. The vast wisdom, wealth, and influence given to the world's well-known king faded when Solomon turned his heart away from the Lord. Was Solomon's rejection of God a deliberate decision or a series of seemingly small steps of compromise and disobedience? **As Solomon continually ignored God's commands, his heart grew cold.** The series of bad decisions he made brought escalating damage. Human choices matter.

Despite Solomon's failures, God remained steadfast and true to His character and promises. God did not move; Solomon did. A life that promised great hope and immense blessing ended in tragedy. Solomon allowed the comforts of this life to rule his heart rather than God, who is the source of every blessing.

Division Into Two Kingdoms – 1 Kings 12:1-24; 2 Chronicles 10:1–12:12

Understanding Israel's divided kingdom provides perspective for our lives today. As we study this time period, we will hear God speak through the prophets and see prophecy fulfilled. We will also see that God remains present among His people and fulfills His promises even through challenging times. **Israel's history demonstrates that God blesses those who live obedient and faithful lives**

5: God's promise to David: 2 Samuel 7:4-17; 1 Chronicles 17:3-15

Helpful Hints

Keeping track of the many kings in these two kingdoms can be challenging. The *Succession of Prophets and Kings* chart, the timeline, and the map provided in your study resources will prove to be helpful throughout this study. In addition, some find it helpful to underline the names of the northern and southern kings in two separate colors. As you study, also consider the context of the word "Israel" to determine whether the author refers to the entire nation or to the northern kingdom alone.

in relationship with Him. We also witness the tragic consequences of rebelling against Him. God's blessings are not measured by physical prosperity and material comfort, but by the daily benefits of a right relationship with Him. Walking humbly with God was key for the people of Israel and remains essential for all people throughout time. God's unchangeable character is on display as He interacts with His people in Israel and Judah.

Rehoboam's Obstinance – 1 Kings 12:1-24; 2 Chronicles 10:1–12:12

God faithfully kept His promise to David. His grandson, Rehoboam, succeeded Solomon on the throne. All of Israel gathered at Shechem for the coronation. During the festivities, the people asked their new king to ease the heavy taxes and labor constrictions placed upon them. In arrogance, Rehoboam sent them away. He consulted with the elders of the kingdom, who wisely urged him to grant the people's request. Rehoboam promptly rejected their advice. He willfully sought the advice of his peers – men who had grown up with him and currently served him. Rehoboam did not seek God. He did not pray.

Rehoboam's contemporaries recommended placing an even heavier burden on the people. He ultimately heeded this unwise counsel and his obstinance bore devastating consequences for the nation. **Rehoboam's pride and foolishness cost him greatly.** As he addressed the kingdom with intimidating and hostile words, the nation of Israel was torn apart. This turn of events fulfilled the Lord's prophecy spoken through Ahijah.

Rehoboam made yet another unwise decision and sent out Adoniram, his foreman over forced labor, to deal with the rebellion. With no respect for Rehoboam or his rule, the rebels stoned Adoniram to death. Rehoboam barely escaped to Jerusalem in his chariot. Still fighting God's decreed plan, this unwise king mustered up 180,000 fighting men to fight a war to regain the kingdom. God sent word to Rehoboam through Shemaiah, "This is what the LORD says: Do not go up to fight against your brothers, the Israelites. Go home, every one of you, for this is my doing" (1 Kings 12:24). **God's will always prevails.** The people obeyed God and left for home. As prophesied, the nation was torn in two.

The kingdom of Judah gained strength during Rehoboam's reign. He fortified cities in Judah and established military defenses. The Levites, who had been rejected as priests in Jeroboam's kingdom, fled to Judah. The people from all the tribes of Israel who set their hearts on following the Lord followed the Levites to Jerusalem, the capital city of the kingdom of Judah. Their influence initially strengthened both Judah and Rehoboam.

However, Rehoboam turned away from God's law and led the people astray. **Unfaithfulness to God results in ruin.** Shishak, king of Egypt, attacked Judah and captured the fortified cities. The prophet Shemaiah returned with words of retribution from God. Recognizing God's punishment as just, the leaders and the king humbled themselves before God, who spared them. However, they remained subject to Shishak for a period of time.

Jeroboam's Opportunity – 1 Kings 12:20

Jeroboam seized the political opportunity before him. The Israelites rejected Rehoboam, killed his messenger, and declared Jeroboam king. Jeroboam became king over Israel as God declared he

would. He rose to power without bloodshed or civil war. **God's Word always comes to pass.** He is trustworthy.

Solomon's kingdom was divided in two. Just as Ahijah had declared, the 10 northern tribes were torn from the kingdom. These 10 tribes retained the name "Israel" for the northern kingdom led by Jeroboam. Judah and Benjamin, the remaining two tribes, combined into one southern kingdom under the name "Judah" led by Rehoboam. **God remained faithful to His Word and His promises and preserved David's dynasty.** Some of Judah's kings faithfully stood with God and upheld God's law and system of worship. However, apostasy ruled within the northern kingdom of Israel; not one of the 20 kings did what was right in the eyes of the Lord.

	Judah (Southern Kingdom)	Israel (Northern Kingdom)
First king	Rehoboam (Solomon's son)	Jeroboam (Solomon's servant)
No. of tribes	2 – Judah and Benjamin	10 – remaining tribes
Capital city	Jerusalem (1 Kings 15:4)	Shechem, later Samaria (1 Kings 16:23-24)
Worship	Temple in Jerusalem	Golden calves in Bethel and Dan
Priests	Levite priests (2 Chronicles 13:10)	Idolatrous priests (2 Chronicles 13:9)
Dynasties	Only one – David's royal line	Many different dynasties
Rulers	Out of 20, 5 godly, 8 or 9 "good"	All 19 led Israel into idolatry
Records	1 and 2 Kings; 2 Chronicles	Most fully in 1 and 2 Kings
Exile	Captives to Babylon, 586 B.C. (2 Kings 25)	Captives to Assyria 722 B.C. (2 Kings 17)

Decline in Both Kingdoms – 1 Kings 12:25–14:31; 2 Chronicles 12:13-16

Jeroboam's Reign in Israel – 1 Kings 12:25–14:20

He Corrupted Worship – 12:25-33

The prophet Ahijah promised Jeroboam a kingdom and challenged Him to obey God.[6] Sadly, Jeroboam did just the opposite. He feared that the people would remain loyal to Rehoboam if they returned to the Jerusalem temple to worship. Jeroboam acted on foolish advice and replayed Aaron's terrible example when he led the Israelites into idolatry in the wilderness.[7] He even repeated Aaron's very words, "Here are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt" (1 Kings 12:28b). He set up two golden calves – one at Bethel, the southern edge of his kingdom, and another at Dan, in the north. **Jeroboam desecrated the purity of worship that God intended for His people and fashioned an idolatrous religious system suited to his liking and convenience.** He appointed all sorts of priests, initiated festivals on dates he chose, and offered sacrifices at Bethel. Because God has ordained how He should be worshiped, this was a grave offense.[8] Jeroboam likely sought to legitimize the system of worship he set up, but nothing that departs from God is legitimate.

6: Jeroboam's challenge: 1 Kings 11:29-39
7: Aaron's golden calf: Exodus 32:1-6
8: Seriousness of idolatry: Exodus 20:1-6

He Ignored Prophets – 13:1–14:18

Two accounts of Jeroboam's dealings with prophets further reveal God's warnings that Jeroboam avoided to his own peril.

The Man of God from Judah – 13:1-34

A nameless "man of God" from Judah confronted Jeroboam as he stood by the altar at Bethel to brazenly offer a sacrifice. The prophet declared that Josiah, a king from David's line, would sacrifice pagan priests and burn their bones there. As a confirming sign, the altar split and ashes poured out. As Jeroboam angrily ordered the man of God to be seized, his hand shriveled. In undeserved mercy, Jeroboam's hand was restored when the man of God prayed for him. **Even in Jeroboam's sinful condition, God was merciful.** This prophecy was fulfilled around 300 years later.[9]

In a strange and somewhat difficult to understand account, the man of God rightly refused Jeroboam's offer of hospitality. Perhaps he did not want, in any way, to legitimize Jeroboam's temple and altar, which were not authorized by God. However, the man of God later disregarded God's instructions and was tricked by an old prophet from Israel who was not a true representative of God. The man of God was then killed by a lion as an act of God's judgment because he allowed himself to be deceived by this false prophet. **While we cannot fully understand God's purposes in these puzzling events, His prophecy and promises remained absolute and true.**[10]

The Prophet Ahijah– 14:1-18

God allowed Jeroboam yet another opportunity to turn to Him in a moment of desperate need. When his son fell ill, Jeroboam asked his wife to disguise herself and go to Shiloh to seek a prophetic word about the boy's fate. He sent her to Ahijah, the very prophet who foretold his rise to power and promised him success if he obeyed God. God alerted Ahijah that the woman was coming, and he delivered devastating news to her. The son would die. Jeroboam's kingdom would be torn from his family. The evil he had committed against God was worse than anyone before him. The prophet offered a gruesome description of the end of Jeroboam's dynasty. The boy died as soon as Jeroboam's wife set foot in the house, just as Ahijah foretold. Jeroboam could have turned to God, even as his judgment was declared.

Jeroboam Died – 14:19-20

These verses offer an unembellished summary of Jeroboam's reign as Israel's king. He served 22 years and died. His son Nadab succeeded him. **The damage to Israel's spiritual life inflicted during Jeroboam's reign cannot be overstated.** He wasted opportunities, shunned God's grace, and led his nation to reject God.

Rehoboam's Reign in Judah – 1 Kings 14:21-31; 2 Chronicles 12:13-16

Rehoboam was a weak leader who failed to lead Judah to follow God wholeheartedly. **Rejecting God and choosing sin brings bitter consequences.** The final words about Judah's first king reveal spiritual slippage with costly consequences. The people of Judah tolerated idolatry and stirred God's

---

9: Prophecy fulfilled: 2 Kings 23:16
10: God's mysterious ways: Deuteronomy 29:29; Isaiah 55:8-9

The Downward Pull of Inward Rebelliousness Against God

The Doctrine of Sin: Its Character and Universality

People in today's world highly value personal autonomy and believe they can make their own life choices without accountability. What is right or wrong, true or a lie has become a moving target for most people. However, without clear boundaries, chaos and confusion abound. Who has the ultimate right to declare what is good and what is bad? Only God, the Creator, knows all and evaluates everything rightly. God stands apart from humanity in His absolute purity and holiness. Therefore, everything we do, think, or say that opposes Him and His will is defined as sin. Opposing God invites His justified wrath and causes untold harm to ourselves and others.[11] Human history and personal experience confirm this is true.

Every human born since Adam and Eve's fall into sin inherits a sinful nature.[12] We sin because our desires are corrupted – so ruined by sin that we cannot please God or satisfy His righteous standards on our own.[13] In our unredeemed state, we value our own pleasure more than God's will. Our minds and will are so ruined that we are without hope – left to ourselves. Our judgment becomes distorted, and the choices we make take us nowhere that matters in the end. Understanding the universal curse of sin elevates our need for God's grace.

The gospel addresses both sin's pervasive damage and the only source of rescue known to mankind. In our sin, we deserve only God's wrath. Christ bore sin's curse for all who believe. God seeks to restore us, but only on His terms and with a recognition of our absolute need of Him. He promises to take us back into a full life with Him when we respond to Him in faith.[14]

Without understanding the universal and eternal damage caused by sin, no viable explanation exists for the evil in the world. Even the internal wrestling between right and wrong within the human heart cannot be explained. We will not turn to Christ for rescue if we do not comprehend the personal and societal damage inflicted by sin. The truth about sin is bad news. But this must be grasped before we can rightly understand the truth about God and the reality about ourselves and the world.

Sin's damage highlights the unfathomable reach of God's grace. He persistently extends mercy to people caught in sin's death grip. Sin's encroaching damage humbles us before the God we have offended but who also offers our only hope. Wariness about vulnerability to sin leads believers to moment-by-moment dependence on God. While we await eternal deliverance from sin's stranglehold, we can experience the Holy Spirit's power to overcome temptation and sin.[15] And when we do sin, we can run to Him in confession and repentance.[16] Our sin is great, but our God is greater. Psalm 25:8-9 says, "Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways. He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way." Through the cross, His mercy endures!

11: God's wrath against sin: John 3:36; Romans 1:18-20; 2:5
12: Fall into sin: Genesis 3
13: Sin's corruption: Psalm 14:1-4; 53:1-4; Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 3:10-11; Ephesians 2:1-3; James 2:10
14: Salvation through Christ: John 10:10; Romans 6:11-23; Ephesians 2:4-5
15: Power over sin: Romans 6:11-14; Ephesians 6:10-18; Colossians 1:13-14
16: Confession and repentance: Romans 2:4; 1 John 1:8-10

righteous, jealous anger. Rehoboam's enemies carried off the treasures of the Jerusalem temple and royal palace, including Solomon's gold shields. Rehoboam fashioned cheap bronze substitutes that seem to symbolize his attempt to replace the lasting spiritual treasure lost during his reign. Conflict with the northern tribe of Israel continued through his reign. Rehoboam died and was succeeded by his son Abijah.

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

God extraordinarily gifted King Solomon to lead Israel, but Solomon failed because he ignored God's warnings and succumbed to sin. When Solomon died, Israel was in such spiritual disarray that rising opposition led by Jeroboam split Israel into two kingdoms, which fulfilled prophecy.[17] Solomon's son Rehoboam led the southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin, known as the kingdom of Judah. Solomon's servant Jeroboam led the northern 10 tribes, known as the kingdom of Israel. Rehoboam faltered in leading Judah, the southern kingdom. He did not listen to the people and ignored wise counsel. Jeroboam led the northern tribes of Israel into flagrant idolatry. **The rejection of God led to chaos for the kings and the nation.**

The repeated failures and fleeting successes experienced by God's people offer needed lessons for us.[18] God's redemptive plan did not halt when Israel severed into two kingdoms. **God continuously offered unrelenting mercy and grace to the Israelites and their leaders, even through seasons of corrective discipline.** Isaiah, a prophet we will study later this year, recorded this message from God: "I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, 'Here am I, here am I.' All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations" (Isaiah 65:1-2). Bitter consequences come when we reject God and His ways, but blessings flow when we surrender to Him, even amidst hardship.

Apply It

Most of Israel's kings did not fully surrender to God. How do you measure your devotion to God? Can you know if your passion for Him is wholehearted or half-hearted? Even when we desire to follow God without reservation, an honest look at our hearts often reveals pockets of resistance. On this side of heaven, will we ever worship and follow God with wholly pure motives and untainted devotion? 2 Chronicles 16:9 tells us that "... the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him. ..." Reject self-reliance and self-rule. Cultivate a heart that longs to know God. Listen for His voice as He speaks to you in prayer and through His Word. Run to His outstretched hand when you falter. **While we will never seek God perfectly until we get rid of our sin nature and are with Jesus in glory, God faithfully seeks and purifies our wandering hearts.** Will you trust God to pursue you, and will you consider yourself His?

17: Prophecy of divided kingdom: 1 Kings 11:29-39
18: Learning from Israel: Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:6-11

Throughout Israel's history, a faithful minority trusted Him, while an unfaithful majority rejected Him. That has not changed. Living for God in the midst of a world or a family where most reject Him is challenging. What does it take to stand for God when it feels like you are standing alone? God's presence within the believer is stronger than anything and anyone that opposes Him.[19] How will you trust God to believe what is true and do what is right when His way seems harder than you expected? As a believer, even when you feel alone, you are never alone. **Standing with and for God is always right.** If you find yourself in a difficult place, confess your fears, cry out to God, and trust Him for the strength you need to remain fully committed to Him.

Solomon squandered great opportunities. Every king of Israel and Judah had an opportunity to serve God and lead the people to submit to Him. Every day, we face choices – opportunities from God to stand for Him. What difference would it make if you viewed every conversation, relationship, and challenge as a chance to see God at work? Our responses to seemingly small opportunities combine to set the course of our lives. While eternity promises joy and great glory, God orchestrates our days and seasons to develop our faith. He delivers His faithfulness in divinely measured and timely doses. What is the hardest thing you face today? How has God woven a spiritual opportunity into that challenge? What is the most joyous circumstance in your life right now? How can God's character shine through your blessing? Do not miss God's opportunities for you by failing to seek Him in daily decisions and for needed strength. This week, even this day, holds moments when you will either set your heart on God or resist Him. **Only God is worthy of your trust and wholehearted devotion.**

19: Overcoming power: Romans 8:31-39; 1 John 4:4

All Scripture quotations, in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ® NIV ®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica Inc.®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Kings of Judah: Abijah and Asa

1 Kings 15:1-24; 2 Chronicles 13–16

Lesson Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 2 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What specific warning or encouragement did God give you through the lecture? What difference did that make in your week?

2. The notes explained the bitter consequences of rejecting God and going your own way. What did you learn that strengthens your desire to trust and surrender to God?

Second Day: Read 1 Kings 15:1-8 and 2 Chronicles 13.

Abijah succeeded Rehoboam as Judah's king, but he led without wholehearted devotion to God.

3. What facts about Abijah's reign are offered in the summary written in 1 Kings 15:1-8?

© BSF 2022 (This material may be downloaded from mybsf.org and used by BSF class members in connection with their personal BSF class studies. It may not be otherwise reproduced without BSF's written permission.)

4. a. In the midst of a crisis, what truths did Abijah declare about God and the kingdom of Israel's relationship with Him (2 Chronicles 13:4-12)?

   b. What lessons can you learn from Abijah's example and God's response (2 Chronicles 13:13-20)?

5. What makes the difference between merely seeking God to escape a crisis and truly turning to Him in a life-transforming way?

Third Day: Read 1 Kings 15:9-15 and 2 Chronicles 14.

Asa trusted God with his whole heart and led Judah to spiritual renewal.

6. What general assessment of Asa's reign do these passages offer?

7. List the specific spiritual reforms that offer evidence of Asa's wholehearted commitment to the Lord.

8. In what ways have you experienced the purifying work of the Lord in your own life?

9. a. What do you learn from Asa's prayer and his battle against the Cushites (2 Chronicles 14:9-15)?

   b. How did God answer Asa's prayer?

Fourth Day: Read 2 Chronicles 15.

Asa responded to the prophet Azariah and united Judah in commitment to God.

10. What message did the Spirit of God speak to Asa through the prophet Azariah?

11. a. How did Azariah's message impact Asa?

    b. How did Asa exercise courageous spiritual leadership that impacted the entire kingdom of Judah?

12. a. When has God led you to take a courageous or public stand with Him? How did you respond?

    b. What is God calling you to remove from your life to be fully devoted to Him?

Fifth Day: Read 1 Kings 15:16-24 and 2 Chronicles 16.

Asa failed to finish strong as his trust in God lapsed in his final years.

13. a. Describe the situation that led to Asa's failure to trust God.

b. Tell how God intervened to offer Asa an opportunity to repent.

c. How did Asa react to Hanani's words?

14. a. When have you struggled to trust God wholeheartedly?

b. What do you learn about God from 2 Chronicles 16?

15. What lessons can you learn from Asa's successes and failures?

Sixth Day: Review 1 Kings 15:1-24 and 2 Chronicles 13–16.

God strengthens those who wholeheartedly depend on Him.

16. How did these passages influence your thinking about wholehearted devotion to God?

No homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders

Lecture Notes

Next step: Read Lesson Notes.

Lesson Notes

1 Kings 15:1-24; 2 Chronicles 13–16

Focus Verse

"The LORD is with you when you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you." – 2 Chronicles 15:2b

Outline

- King Abijah: A Life of Failure Despite Momentary Faith – 1 Kings 15:1-8; 2 Chronicles 13
- King Asa: A Life of Faith Despite Momentary Failure – 1 Kings 15:9-24; 2 Chronicles 14–16

Engage

The term "directionally correct" is often used in the analysis of projects or plans. This usually means that in spite of a few zigs and zags, things are basically headed on the right path. So how do you know if your life is "directionally correct"? No one can boast perfection amidst life circumstances and human limitations. None of us could graph our walk with the Lord as a straight upward line. **Despite the moments we shine and the times we falter, the overall course of our spiritual life is quite revealing.** Recurring daily choices become lifelong patterns that greatly impact our direction and priorities.

This week, we study two of Judah's kings with dramatically different life trajectories. One king turned his back on God except in a moment of crisis. The other king followed God with his whole heart but failed to finish well. In both cases, God's mercy and grace shine brighter than the failures and successes of these men. What is the encouragement for us? Our commitment to God and dependence on Him are certainly not perfect. However, the direction of our lives matters. **God strengthens those who wholeheartedly depend on Him.** How is God calling you to seek Him above all else?

King Abijah: A Life of Failure Despite Momentary Faith – 1 Kings 15:1-8; 2 Chronicles 13

Abijah's General Failure – 1 Kings 15:1-8

When Rehoboam died, his son Abijah assumed Judah's throne. To avoid confusion, note that some Bible versions record his name as "Abijam." His name is also similar or identical to other people

we have or will encounter in our study.[1] Abijah reigned only three years in Judah during the parallel reign of Jeroboam in the kingdom of Israel.

Abijah's story begins with this summary in 1 Kings 15:3: "He committed all the sins his father had done before him; his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his forefather had been." **Despite his failings, God graciously established Abijah and made Jerusalem strong for David's sake.** Abijah spoke loud, pious professions when he needed God's help but faltered in steadfast commitment to God and His commands.

Additional details about his reign are recorded in 2 Chronicles 13. **The books of 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles contain similar content, but also unique accounts of the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah.** We will often alternate between Kings and Chronicles in this study.

Abijah's Moment of Faith – 2 Chronicles 13

His Overwhelming Challenge – 13:1-3

Conflict with the northern kingdom of Israel characterized Abijah's reign. The division in God's people erupted into war. The ten tribes of Israel assembled 800,000 fighting men for battle, outnumbering Judah's 400,000 soldiers two to one. **Abijah faced overwhelming odds in this civil war between God's own people.** God often allows His people to encounter overwhelming situations that develop their dependence on Him and His power.

His Confrontation of the Adversary – 13:4-12

In this moment of crisis, Abijah said the right things. He boldly launched a verbal assault against his enemy. We are challenged to reconcile this blast of truth in a pressure-filled crisis from such a half-hearted man. Abijah's words seem to merge boasting and faith. He offered three charges against Jeroboam.

God called me, not you, to David's throne – 13:4-7

Abijah reminded Jeroboam, and all of Israel, that God had promised Israel's kingship to David and his descendants. God ordained David's lasting dynasty, which would eventually lead to Jesus, His Son, the promised Messiah. Jeroboam did not bring the proper lineage to the throne. Jeroboam had ascended to his throne through rebellion against Rehoboam, Solomon's son. He had gathered "worthless scoundrels" to join him in his mutiny.

We worship the true God; you worship idols – 13:8-11

Abijah confronted the foolishness in Israel's worship of golden calves rather than the one, true God. Jeroboam attempted to legitimize his reign by establishing cult worship and a temple God had not authorized. His flagrant idolatry had caused Israel's true priests – the Levites, descendants of Aaron – to flee. The self-appointed priests who took their place did not meet God's standards. By contrast, Abijah offered examples of how the people of Judah worshiped. They followed the proper ceremonies and prescribed worship practices that God had set up for His people.

1: Confusing names: 1 Kings 14:1-16; 15:27

Fighting God is foolish – 13:12

Abijah offered a warning, which Jeroboam dismissed. The opportunity to turn to God and avoid disaster was missed. Abijah boldly declared, "God is with us; he is our leader." **To fight against Judah was to fight God Himself.** Abijah promised Jeroboam that he would not succeed. Jeroboam and his nation had forsaken God. Why do human beings foolishly and frequently resist Almighty God? Rebellion against God involves more than resisting His power. To turn from God is to spurn His grace and love as well.

What do we make of Abijah's courageous verbal assault against his enemy? His words sound pretty good on the surface, but we already know the truth about his half-hearted devotion to God. **In His grace, God brought victory because God keeps His commitments – in this case His promises to David.**

Pious public declarations of devotion to God ring hollow without a heart fully surrendered to Him. Only God knows the truth about what lies beneath human words and actions. Our call is to fully surrender to God, aligning our hearts with our profession of allegiance to Him.

His Moment of Faith – 13:13-22

Jeroboam positioned troops to Judah's rear, flanking them on both sides. **In this desperate moment, the people of Judah cried out to God.** The priests blew trumpets, and the men of Judah sounded the battle cry. Their cry for help reached heaven, and God's power was released on their behalf. Abijah's troops inflicted heavy losses on Israel – 500,000 of Jeroboam's 800,000 fighting men fell in the battle. The Israelites fled as God gave Judah the victory.

Both Israel's defeat and Judah's conquest exhibit God's gracious and persistent call to His people. There was no doubt that God alone was the source of Judah's triumph. The army faced overwhelming odds and experienced a great victory. In this specific moment, Abijah and Judah relied on God. As a result, they saw Him accomplish what human strength could not. God also graciously offered Jeroboam and Israel a warning call to return to Him. Through the mouth of a half-hearted king, God confronted their foolish rebellion and idolatry. The severe losses in battle should have awakened them to the futility of rejecting God.

In mercy, God often takes His people into situations where trusting Him is their only option. Calamity and desperation often soften our hearts toward God. **While overwhelming situations often lead us to Him, God is equally available and faithful on days when we are less aware of our neediness.** God orchestrates our lives to teach us to depend on Him. Refusing God's gracious calls to faith brings serious consequences.

King Asa: A Life of Faith Despite Momentary Failure – 1 Kings 15:9-24; 2 Chronicles 14–16

1 Kings 15:9-24 offers a summary of Asa's reign. He assumed Judah's throne upon the death of his father, Abijah. **Asa reigned 41 years and brought spiritual reforms to the kingdom of Judah, despite a spiritual lapse near the end of his life.** 1 Kings 15:14b declares, "… Asa's heart was fully committed to the LORD all his life." 2 Chronicles 14–16 records the details of his life and leadership in Judah.

Believing God

The Doctrine of Faith

This week's passage tells the story of two kings who demonstrated two very different pictures of faith or the lack of it. What makes faith genuine? Biblical faith is far more than an optimism that everything will work out well. **At its simplest, faith means believing God and acting on what He has declared as true.** More than passive intellectual agreement with facts, true faith rises to action.[2]

Saving faith involves three essential elements. First, content or *specific* truth – faith embraces the essentials of the gospel and God's truth about salvation in Christ.[3] Second, this leads to *conviction* – a trust in and response to Christ's personal love and offer of salvation from sin.[4] Third, this *commitment moves to action* – an active choice to repent from sin and follow Christ.[5] Perhaps the greatest challenge to faith is the death to self and surrender to Christ that true faith requires. Faith reaches beyond the visible prizes of this world to walk with God in this life and to anticipate eternal treasure.[6]

Many people profess faith but fall short of the full surrender sincere faith demands. Truth about God can be kept at an intellectual level, without bearing weight on daily choices. Without genuine faith, God becomes a lifeline in an emergency, a distant but unconfirmed hope, or a possibility among other options. **To acknowledge God but fail to surrender to Him reveals a lack of belief in who He truly is, what He has done, and what He has promised.** What does your level of surrender reveal about the reality of your faith?

For those with genuine faith, God and His promises ring so true that nothing else this world offers can compare. Life's challenges can cause genuine faith to temporarily falter. No believer offers wholehearted commitment at every moment. Faith, however, remains grounded and secured by God's faithfulness, not our own. Faith in God today means trusting Christ for salvation – the only way to find true meaning in daily life. Deliberate application of God's specific and unchanging promises provides stability and joy on weekdays and weekends – through seasons of ease and seasons of strain. Do you trust God with eternity? Do you also trust Him with your biggest challenge today? Unswervingly believe what God has declared to be true. Surrender to the Holy Spirit's power to apply that truth to your life and eternity. Commit your choices to that reality. Believe what God says and act on it! God is the truest truth that exists.

Asa's Beginnings – 2 Chronicles 14:1-8

Asa brought needed rest and restoration to Judah. According to 2 Chronicles 14:2, "Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God." To please God and do what He declares as right requires actively turning from evil to stand with God. In the first 10 years of Asa's reign, he

---

2: Beyond intellectual belief: James 2:17-19
3: Faith's content: Matthew 16:16; Acts 4:12; 16:31
4: Faith's conviction: John 1:12; 3:16; 6:37; Acts 16:14
5: Faith's commitment: Matthew 11:28-30; Luke 9:23; 14:25-27; Acts 3:19; 20:21; Romans 12:1-2
6: Seeking heavenly treasure: Hebrews 11

inaugurated aggressive spiritual reforms in Judah. He purified his nation by removing idols and the degrading practices that surrounded them.

Judah experienced a period of unprecedented rest from war during the first decade of Asa's rule.[7] In this time of peace, Asa strengthened Judah's defenses. He fortified towns throughout the land and equipped an army of 280,000 brave soldiers from the tribe of Benjamin in addition to Judah's own 300,000 men. With passionate zeal, Asa began well by leading his people to seek God and obey God's commands. Times of reprieve not only provide rest but also allow God's people to develop strength necessary for more difficult times.

Asa's Battle – 2 Chronicles 14:9-15

The Problem – 14:9-10

A massive army and 300 chariots from Cush, an area in Northern Africa, gathered against Judah. Inevitably, circumstances test the depth of our faith. Asa led his people to establish habits of seeking God during a time of peace. When presented with a military threat, crying out to God was a natural response. Asa went out to meet Zerah, the leader of the Cushite army, as Judah's defenses were positioned for battle.

The Prayer – 14:11

Asa responded with a powerful prayer, not panic. His prayer offers a beautiful example of calling on God in a time of trouble. People seldom learn to pray like this in the heat of a moment, but rather through regular experiences of depending on God and seeing Him work. Asa offered a short and direct prayer from the battlefield.

"LORD, there is no one like you to help the powerless against the mighty."

Asa began by recounting proven truth about God and His steadfast character. He focused on God's reputation for helping the powerless to stand against the mighty. God is known for reversing overwhelming odds, and in this case, Asa's army was vastly outnumbered. Circumstances and human emotions often deny what is resolutely true – God is stronger than anything else. God's merciful heart longs to act on behalf of those who recognize their powerlessness and trust Him to demonstrate His might.

God often works in ways that overcome human weakness and seemingly impossible odds. Joseph was raised to a position of power from suffering and prison.[8] David, a shepherd boy, prevailed over the giant Goliath using only a slingshot.[9] Jesus poured Himself into a band of ill-equipped disciples and commissioned them to take the life-changing gospel to the world.[10] **God's work is accomplished through His power – never by human strength.**

7: Rest from war: Exodus 33:14; Joshua 1:13
8: Joseph: Genesis 41
9: David and Goliath: 1 Samuel 17
10: Jesus and the disciples: Matthew 28:16-20

"Help us, LORD our God, for we rely on you ..."

In a faith-filled cry for help, Asa confessed utter dependence on God for victory. This plea revealed human desperation, but also his wholehearted belief that the vast army posed no threat to God. Judah would fight this battle in God's name and through His power. Asa sought God's direct intervention to provide the emotional, spiritual, and physical strength needed to fight the vast army before him. Asa understood that he represented and fought on behalf of God. That was his source of strength. Life offers daily opportunities to assess the frailty of our own strength so that we will turn to God. Crying out to God for help is a regular part of walking with Him in this world.

"... do not let mere mortals prevail against you."

Asa compared the threat of the army to the power of God. A proper view of God gives perspective to everything we face. Honor for God drove Asa in his struggle. Believing what is true about God involves far more than intellectual knowledge. Deliberate focus on the magnitude of God's person and power fosters hope in the midst of the challenges we face.

The Power – 14:12-15

In response to Asa's prayer and in a dramatic display of God's power, Judah experienced resounding victory over the Cushite army. Judah received abundant plunder from the battle and overtook many villages around Gerar. God showered grace on Judah, despite much that remained unpleasing to Him within the kingdom.

Asa's Boldness – 2 Chronicles 15

Encouraging Words – 15:1-7

The Spirit of God led the prophet Azariah to offer Asa and all of Judah a solemn charge: "The LORD is with you when you are with him." Azariah also warned Asa that God's protection would be lost if he abandoned God. Azariah then recounted God's history in helping the Israelites overcome oppression and distress. **Through His prophet, God called Asa to not give up and to steadfastly continue in the right direction.** God promised that Asa's work would be rewarded. Following God involves more than starting well; diligent commitment is needed to follow God wholeheartedly.

Decisive Action – 15:8-19

Encouraged by God's strong message, Asa relaunched the program to remove idolatry from Judah. He repaired the altar and brought treasures back into the temple. He assembled the nation and called the people to renew their commitment to the Lord. **Asa's wholehearted love for God led the nation to a unified declaration of joyful commitment to God.** In a daring and bold step, he deposed Maakah, the queen mother, and her abhorrent idolatry.

The overall assessment of Asa's reign remains positive, despite some failures near the end of his life. Not all the high places and idolatry were removed from Judah. Until the 35th year of Asa's reign, Judah remained at peace, without war. Evidence of God's grace on His people continued.

Asa's Backsliding – 2 Chronicles 16

Conflict – 16:1

Asa's courageous leadership and active loyalty to God waned in his later years. **In the 36th year of Asa's reign, the northern kingdom of Israel, led by King Baasha, laid siege on Judah.** A blockade was put in place by building fortifications at Ramah, which was situated only about five miles (eight kilometers) from Jerusalem. This military maneuver threatened Asa and Judah.

Compromise – 16:2-6

In the face of this encroaching danger, Asa turned to a pagan nation instead of to God for help. Considering Asa's former strength and courage as a leader, his forward movement without consulting God is difficult to understand. Why did this faithful king make a pact with a pagan king? We often underestimate the costly consequences of seemingly small compromises.

Employing methods of diplomacy common in the world, Asa offered Ben-Hadad of Aram (Syria) payment to break his treaty with Israel and ally with Judah instead. Asa even compensated Ben-Hadad by giving him temple treasures dedicated to the Lord. On the surface, this new alliance succeeded: Ben-Hadad's forces overcame the army of Baasha.

Confrontation – 16:7-9

Asa's compromise did not escape God's notice. The prophet, or seer, Hanani strongly rebuked Asa on God's behalf. He clearly stated that Asa had refused to rely on the Lord, even after his experience with God's deliverance over the Cushites. Within this rebuke, Hanani offered the Lord's call to turn back to Him: "For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him." **In response to Asa's foolish choice, Hanani announced that the remainder of Asa's reign would be plagued by constant war.**

Calloused Heart – 16:10-14

Rather than being convicted by God's corrective discipline, Asa became angry that his choices had been challenged. Enraged, Asa imprisoned Hanani for offering a just criticism. He began to oppress his own people. And tragically, a severe disease in his feet plagued his final years of life. Asa failed to seek healing or help from the Lord. After a 41-year reign in Judah, Asa died. His people honored him with a great bonfire and royal burial. Despite his weak finish, Asa accomplished great things for God within Judah.

Certainly, this final failure makes us wonder about Asa's wholehearted commitment to the Lord. How grateful we are that God looks on flawed people with grace and mercy! The lives of both Abijah and Asa illustrate the importance of daily choices to trust God and walk in faithfulness to Him. Whether in a moment of dire need or walking through seemingly ordinary days, we stand in constant need of God and His help. **God strengthens those who wholeheartedly depend on Him.** God demonstrates His faithfulness to those who trust in Him.

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Abijah and Asa were two kings with dramatically different stories. Abijah's heart was not fully devoted to God, and he left a legacy of war and compromise. He failed to follow the ways of King David who, despite failure, sought God with an undivided heart. For Abijah, God was more of an emergency plan than a lifelong pursuit. He spoke for God and cried out to Him in a moment of crisis. In mercy, God preserved Abijah and Judah and delivered them from certain destruction in a war against Jeroboam, king of Israel. Abijah experienced God's deliverance in battle, yet he did not walk faithfully before God through the many less stressful days that he sat on Judah's throne. **Only God can rightly judge Abijah's flicker of faith, but wholehearted commitment to God was not the overall direction of his life.**

Asa took his father's throne and led Judah into needed spiritual reform. He did what was right in the Lord's eyes, following the example of his forefather, King David. He courageously removed idolatry and the idolatrous queen mother, Maakah. Asa fortified Judah through the peaceful years of his reign. When he faced military attack, he confidently and comfortably cried out to the Lord who had been his Rock all the days of his life. Asa led Judah into a covenant-pledging commitment to seek God. Unfortunately, after reigning 36 years, Asa sought help from the king of Aram rather than the Lord. He failed to yield to God's warning and discipline and died a painful death. **Despite Asa's end-of-life lapse, Scripture records that "... Asa's heart was fully committed to the LORD all his life" (1 Kings 15:14b).** God's grace abounded to Asa; Judah benefited from his leadership.

Apply It

God listens when we cry out to Him. He perfectly discerns the deepest desires within our hearts. Like Abijah, do you only seek God in moments of desperation? **Crying out to God should not be reserved for matters of life and death.** We should not wait to pray until we are out of all other options. You can speak to God naturally and regularly, coming in and out of prayer through the course of your days. Thank Him for sunshine and laughter. Honestly tell Him the fears that rage in your heart; He already knows and longs to help you. Cry out for Him to strengthen your faith when you doubt. If calamity teaches you to run into God's strong arms, count that as a blessing. Keep running to God. Psalm 73:28 says, "But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds." How is God teaching you to be so comfortable in His presence that you run to Him throughout both hard days and ordinary ones?

What does it take to finish strong? Long-distance runners burst off the starting block but must also successfully cross the finish line. Asa's story and the lives of people we know remind us that spiritual laziness reaps dire consequences, despite God's grace. Walking steadfastly with God cannot be accomplished in human strength. **Through His power alone, God equips His children to walk faithfully with Him, even over the course of a lifetime.** Are you closer to the Lord than you were last year? What sin has God conquered in your life? Refusing to tolerate complacency and compromise is vital to ongoing spiritual growth. What community of believers calls you forward in faith and obedience? We should not withhold anything from God's purifying work through

the Holy Spirit. When you fall into sin, do you welcome the Holy Spirit's conviction and consider repentance a gift of God's grace? Trust God to lead you steadily forward. Despite the zigs and zags of life, is your spiritual life directionally correct?

There are spiritual battles at every stage of life. Children growing into adulthood struggle to trust and obey God as they gain increasing independence. Life's middle years demand focus on work, family, and many practical matters. Our later years bring declining health, the loss of independence, and a sense that the biggest battles have already been fought. **Every age and life stage brings spiritual struggles and the need to utterly depend on God.** We should not assume children and teenagers are not mature enough to trust God. We must not count the middle years as too congested to make following God a priority. And, as we age, we must steadfastly trust that God still has work to do – in us and through us. When it comes to faith, we are never on cruise control. God calls us to stay engaged, actively trusting Him. How is God using your life stage as a call to faith in Him?

Ultimately, walking faithfully with God utterly depends on His unrelenting faithfulness. When we stray, He warns us and calls us back to Himself. He continues to open our eyes to compounding truths about His character and ways. Anything we do for Him is only because He has loved us, pursued us, and provided what we lack. We should not seek God merely to avoid negative consequences or feel good about ourselves. The purest motive for obeying God and serving Him faithfully is an ever-deepening love for Him. The God who lavishes His love on undeserving sinners is worthy of your unrelenting devotion. There is so much to love about God that eternity's praises will never exhaust the beauty of His love. How is God calling you to set your gaze on Him so that other things matter less, and He matters more? **A faithful walk with God demands constant dependence on Him.**

All Scripture quotations in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ® NIV ®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Elijah: Prophet to the Northern Kingdom of Israel

1 Kings 15:25–18:46

Lesson Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 3 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the notes specifically encourage you to walk faithfully with God? How did you apply that this week?

2. How did God use the lecture to bring clarity, conviction, or challenge as you processed the lives and choices of Asa and Abijah?

Second Day: Read 1 Kings 15:25–17:6.

Elijah entered the scene in the kingdom of Israel amid a succession of evil kings.

3. Record the names of Israel's six kings listed in 15:25–16:34. What were some of the results of their leadership choices?

© BSF 2022 (This material may be downloaded from mybsf.org and used by BSF class members in connection with their personal BSF class studies. It may not be otherwise reproduced without BSF's written permission.)

4. a. What announcement did Elijah make to King Ahab?

   b. How did God protect and provide for Elijah?

   c. What do you learn about God as you reflect on Elijah's experience?

5. Tell about a situation in which God protected or provided for you in ways you did not expect.

Third Day: Read 1 Kings 17:7-24.

God sent Elijah to a destitute widow to meet his needs and develop his faith.

6. a. How did the widow's actions demonstrate faith?

   b. What did Elijah and this woman experience that revealed God and stretched their budding faith?

7. a. In what ways did the widow and Elijah respond to the grief they experienced?

   b. How do you respond or react when life raises hard questions or causes you to doubt God?

8. Elijah believed God could raise the dead. How does God's power over death give you hope and alleviate your fears (see Isaiah 25:8; 1 Corinthians 15:54-57; and Philippians 3:20-21)?

Fourth Day: Read 1 Kings 18:1-39.

Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to a showdown at Mount Carmel.

9. How did Elijah's providential encounter with Obadiah set the stage for the events that followed?

10. In what ways did Elijah's words and actions on Mount Carmel boldly express courageous faith?

11. a. What specific requests did Elijah pray to God, and how did God answer?

    b. How did the people respond?

    c. According to James 5:16-18, what was the key to the power God demonstrated in Elijah's life?

12. Tell about a situation you are currently facing where standing for God requires faith and courage. What are you asking God to do?

Fifth Day: Read 1 Kings 18:40-46.

Elijah slaughtered the prophets of Baal, and God sent rain to Israel.

13. Why might the judgment of the 450 prophets of Baal have been required?

14. a. How did Elijah demonstrate faith and expectancy as he waited for God to bring rain?

    b. What impresses you most about Elijah?

15. What prayer are you waiting on God to answer? How can you demonstrate faith and expectancy while you wait?

Sixth Day: Review 1 Kings 15:25–18:46.

God powerfully provides for those who stand with Him.

16. How did your study this week impact your thinking about prayer and God's power?

No homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders

Lecture Notes

Next step: Read Lesson Notes.

Lesson Notes

1 Kings 15:25–18:46

Focus Verse

"Answer me, LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.'" – 1 Kings 18:37

Outline

- Elijah Exploded Onto the Scene – 1 Kings 15:25–17:1
- Elijah Experienced God's Provision – 1 Kings 17:2-24
- Elijah Exposed God's Power – 1 Kings 18

Engage

Have you ever lit a candle in the midst of an electrical blackout? A small flicker of light suddenly cuts through to illuminate what the darkness has hidden. We often feel like God's light has gone out in our world or at least been significantly dimmed. Evil is applauded, and God seems ignored. People do what is right in their own eyes with little sense of accountability to Him. However, no matter how pervasive the darkness can seem, God's light will never be extinguished. His message and voice will not be silenced. **In the midst of the majority who turn their back on their Creator, God calls individuals to boldly speak for Him and stand for what is right.**

Evil and idolatry escalated in the kingdom of Israel. In the midst of this, God raised up a prophet to stand against wickedness and proclaim the truth. Elijah knew that the one true God was stronger than anyone or anything that opposed Him. Clothed in the power of Almighty God, Elijah courageously appeared before evil men. **God powerfully provides for those who stand with Him.** God's light will never go out. In a world where evil appears out of control, God remains in control. He still speaks. His light shines through His people.

Elijah Exploded Onto the Scene – 1 Kings 15:25–17:1

The Parade of Evil Kings in Israel – 15:25–16:34

As we shift our focus from the kingdom of Judah to the kingdom of Israel, these verses offer a dismal and blunt record of escalating evil. A succession of wicked kings seized power through murderous coups and amidst ongoing political strife. **The historical record of the kingdom of Israel reveals**

catastrophic and escalating spiritual decline. This passage lists the six kings who followed Israel's King Jeroboam and who led Israel deep into rebellion against God: Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Omri, and Ahab.

Our next lessons enter the scene during the reign of the notoriously wicked King Ahab. Married to Jezebel, also infamously sinful, Ahab was "more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him." He normalized sin and fortified his kingdom in idolatry. However, God's light prevails over darkness. **Against this bleak backdrop, God sent the mighty prophet Elijah.** The story of this powerful man of God offers rich encouragement and lessons for us.

The Prophet God Sent to Israel – 17:1

The wickedness rising within Israel did not escape God's attention. King Ahab set up a temple to Baal, a false god that would plague their future. He led the people into pervasive idolatry and aroused the Lord's righteous anger. **As God's own people rejected Him and turned to other gods, He sent the prophet Elijah to pronounce His judgment on their sin.** God's discipline and acts of judgment upon the Israelites were not merely punitive but also corrective. His wrath against their sin is clear, but so is His compassionate and persistent pursuit of their wandering hearts.

Elijah crashed into Ahab's presence like a thunderclap from heaven. With no recorded backstory, Elijah arrived with unknown credentials and from an unknown place. Scholars cannot locate his town, Tishbe. Elijah's end was just as unexpected as his beginning. While he was still talking to his successor Elisha, Elijah was swept up to the sky by a whirlwind in a chariot of fire.[1] **Between Elijah's sudden appearance and spectacular exit lies a succession of amazing miracles and accomplishments.**

Elijah's unswerving allegiance to the one true God makes him stand tall among Old Testament personalities. His story reveals his stern and passionate zeal for God alongside his real compassion and personal struggles. The New Testament speaks more of Elijah than any other Old Testament prophet. Elijah appeared with Moses at the Transfiguration of the Lord Jesus.[2] God's strength propelled the ministry of this intriguing prophet.

Elijah's abrupt entrance sets up a showdown between the stronghold of evil and the power of Almighty God. God provided Elijah with the courage to deliver a grim message to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word." **A devastating drought would bring famine and human suffering and only cease when Elijah said so.**[3] How and why would God work this way? Baal worshipers believed their god had to be awakened from the dead to provide rain. At the end of three dry years, they would know that neither drought nor rain were a quirk of nature. The power of the Creator God, who controls every drop of water in the universe, was put on vibrant display.[4] When the idolatrous Israelites next saw rain three and a half years later, the powerlessness of their false gods would be clear.

1: Elijah's sudden departure: 2 Kings 2:11
2: Transfiguration: Matthew 17:1-13; Luke 9:28-36
3: Elijah and the drought: James 5:17-18
4: God controls rain: Genesis 2:5; 7:4; Job 38:25-28; Psalm 147:8; Amos 4:7

Elijah Experienced God's Provision – 1 Kings 17:2-24

Elijah's bold pronouncement made him a wanted man. Ahab and Jezebel blamed Elijah for the suffering they and their kingdom endured. The Lord warned him to head east of Jordan to the Kerith Ravine. At this place and through this trying period, God graciously met Elijah's practical needs.

God's Provision in the Wilderness – 17:2-7

God provided Elijah a place of refuge. He promised to meet the prophet's needs. Elijah obeyed God and headed to the designated hideaway. **He drank from the brook, and ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and evening.** To an Israelite, ravens were considered an unclean bird. This experience surely humbled Elijah. With time to think and regular reminders of God's care, Elijah learned that the God he served was trustworthy and good.

God did not remove Elijah from the famine but cared for his needs in a miraculous and unexpected way. Surely this early experience in Elijah's ministry prepared him for the future. He was hidden from those who sought him harm and sheltered by a God who loved him. God was training His servant in faith, humility, submission, and obedience. Elijah learned to have confidence in God's tender care. When the brook dried up due to the intensifying drought, God led His faithful servant to yet another experience that developed Elijah's faith.

God's Provision Through a Starving Widow – 17:8-24

The Depleted Jar – 17:8-16

God did not meet Elijah's needs by sending him to a wealthy benefactor but rather to a starving widow in Zarephath, a region of Sidon. This Phoenician town was located in Jezebel's home territory – right in the heart of Baal worship. This humbling situation revealed the extent of Elijah's neediness and required him to depend fully on God. He often reveals His gracious care and meets our needs in ways we do not anticipate.

Elijah arrived at the town gate and found the widow gathering sticks. He asked her for water and bread. **The woman told Elijah that she did not have bread, but only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug.** She was gathering sticks to build a fire to prepare a last meal for herself and her son before they died of starvation. We can only imagine Elijah's thoughts as he heard the dire circumstances into which God had clearly sent him.

Rather than apologizing for his bold request, Elijah called this struggling widow to bold faith. He told her not to be afraid. She was to go home and first make something for him and then for herself and her son. He called this woman to believe in advance what would only make sense later. Elijah bolstered his request with a promise straight from God: "For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD sends rain on the land.'"

The widow experienced regular deliveries of God's miraculous provision through sacrificial obedience and decisive faith. She experienced God's sufficiency in a tremendously personal way. Every time she reached into the jar for flour and tipped the oil jug to pour out what she needed that day, she had the opportunity to praise God for what only He could have provided. **God delivered His provision one meal at a time.** She and her son were sustained as God also met Elijah's needs.

God meets our needs out of His generous abundance. He never lacks anything or struggles to provide what we need. **God can lavishly provide from a "jar" we deem as empty.** Sometimes we have to serve God when we are weary and tired. Other times, we must trust God for financial needs, family needs, or answers we lack. God's loving purposes go beyond merely easing our pressure or solving a practical problem. When God meets our needs in these extremely personal ways, we learn that He can be trusted. God develops our faith by revealing His sufficiency and calling us to trust Him more.

The Dead Boy – 17:17-24

Sometime later, the widow's son became desperately ill and died. She bitterly blamed Elijah for his death. This woman could bear no more. She had already lost her husband and faced impending death during a famine. **Even while she was actively trusting God and caring for His prophet, the unthinkable had happened – her beloved son lay dead.** This painful reality raised agonizing questions.

Whenever He provided for a physical need in Elijah's life, God had a greater spiritual goal.

Elijah sprang to action on her behalf. He scooped up the boy, took him to an upper room, and cried out to the Lord in anguish and desperation. He stretched himself out over the boy and boldly prayed, "LORD my God, let this boy's life return to him!" Verse 22 simply states a miracle too big for human words, "The LORD heard Elijah's cry ...." **The God of heaven – the giver of life – answered Elijah's prayer and raised the dead boy back to life.** Elijah presented the boy to his mother. Out of her overwhelmed heart she spoke words of solid faith, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth."

This amazing resurrection built the widow's faith in Elijah's God and served as faith training for Elijah, training he would need in the very next events of his life. God demonstrated His mighty power and awesome provision through this miracle of life. Whenever He provided for a physical need in Elijah's life, God had a greater spiritual goal. **God builds our faith by meeting our needs and allowing us to share our faith with others.**

Elijah Exposed God's Power – 1 Kings 18

Elijah and Obadiah – 18:1-16

After three long years of severe drought and famine, God again sent Elijah before King Ahab to announce that He would mercifully send rain. Ahab's palace administrator was a man named Obadiah – a devout believer in the Lord. This Obadiah, a different man than the prophet by the same name, had courageously protected a hundred godly prophets from Jezebel's murderous wrath by hiding

God Brings Life to What Is Dead

The Doctrine of Resurrection

The resurrection of the beloved son of a struggling widow demonstrated God's power over death. **In a much greater way, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead offers unshakable hope for everyone who puts their faith in Him.** Jesus offered His life as He died on the cross. He paid sin's price in full. When He rose again, He sealed victory over sin and death for those who trust Him for salvation. This glorious truth stands as the foundation for many Christian doctrines.[5]

Through Jesus' resurrection power, believers can live a redeemed life because the Holy Spirit brings life to dead hearts. Romans 8:11 says, "And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you." Jesus paid sin's great cost and solved mankind's most pressing crisis – physical and spiritual death. Just as Jesus was raised, all believers will be resurrected in a glorified body prepared for eternity.[6] **Jesus' resurrection sealed His victory over sin and death for those who trust Him for salvation.**

Apart from the truth of Jesus' resurrection, death wins. What does life even mean if there is no hope beyond our last breath? People are born and experience some joy and sorrow, but it all ends. Something within us tells us there should be more.

There is more. We were created in God's own image, with an inborn sense of our eternality.[7] **Jesus' resurrection promises that, through Him, we will be raised again to life eternal.** His resurrection won back what sin stole from humanity. Job 19:25-26 states it well: "I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God." Because Jesus lives, we shall live also.

them in caves and supplying them with food and water. We can only imagine his internal conflict as he served both Ahab and the Lord. Obadiah was dutifully searching the land for grass for Ahab's animals. He saw and recognized Elijah, who asked Obadiah to arrange an audience with Ahab. Given Ahab's all-out effort to locate and kill Elijah, Obadiah feared that this task meant his own certain death. When Elijah emphasized his God-given task to appear before Ahab, Obadiah agreed.

The Showdown at Mount Carmel – 18:17-40

Elijah stood before King Ahab, who callously greeted him as the "troubler of Israel." Ahab blamed God and Elijah rather than recognizing that his own sin had caused his nation's distress. How often do we blame anyone but ourselves for our sin? Elijah confronted the issue head-on and responded to Ahab with a bold challenge. First, he clearly identified that Ahab and his father's family bore responsibility for Israel's troubles. They, not Elijah, were the ones who had rejected God to follow

---

5: The centrality of the resurrection: 1 Corinthians 15
6: Believers' future resurrection: Philippians 3:20-21
7: Eternal perspective: Ecclesiastes 3:11; Hebrews 11:19

Baal. Secondly, Elijah called on Ahab to gather people from all Israel as well as the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah who ate at Jezebel's table. **Elijah set up a showdown between God Almighty and the false gods the Israelites worshiped.**

Ahab sent out word and gathered the prophets as Elijah directly challenged the people: "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." The people said nothing. **Though vastly outnumbered by the false priests, Elijah did not stand alone but rather with the one true God.**

Elijah instructed the priests to bring two bulls and prepare one for sacrifice; he would prepare the other. They would call on their gods, and he would call on his God. **Elijah laid down the challenge: "The god who answers by fire – he is God."** The priests of Baal went first, calling to Baal from morning till noon without response. They danced around the altar as Elijah taunted, "Shout louder! … Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened." Despite their frantic activity until time for the evening sacrifice, no one answered – there was no response.

Elijah called the people and repaired the altar that had been torn down. He took 12 stones, representing Israel's 12 tribes, and built the altar. He dug a trench around the altar and filled four large jugs with water. Three times, he ordered the wood on the altar to be soaked with water from the jars. **At the time of sacrifice, Elijah passionately prayed for the Lord to make Himself known as the God of Israel.** He did not seek to merely show up the priests of Baal. Elijah wanted the people of Israel to know the Lord was God and to turn their hearts back to Him. A sacrifice for the sin of the people had to be offered before God would restore the land with rain.

In answer to Elijah's prayer, fire fell from heaven and consumed the sacrifice as well as the entire altar including the water in the trench. God accepted the sacrifice. God provided power from on high. The stunned crowd fell down and declared, "The LORD – he is God!"

Elijah ordered the 450 prophets of Baal to be seized and slaughtered in the Kishon Valley. The modern name for this area is Nahr el-Mokattah, or "the river of slaughter." This grisly scene emphasizes the judgment awaiting those who reject God and lead others to do so.[8] Elijah's response was not merely punitive but reflected God's desire for the purity of His people. **Every act of judgment recorded in Scripture reveals the seriousness of sin and offers a call to repentance.**

The Persistent Prayer that Unlocked God's Promises – 18:41-46

God provided rain in a direct response to Elijah's prayers and in a clear display of His power. Ahab was sent away to eat and drink while Elijah waited for rain to fall. He climbed the mountain with his servant, confident in God's promise even though not a cloud was in the sky. Seven times he sent his servant to check for signs of the coming storm. Finally, the servant reported a small cloud forming over the sea. Elijah sent a message to Ahab telling him to board his chariot and begin his journey in anticipation of the downpour. As the sky turned black and the rain began to furiously fall, Elijah was so energized by the power of the Lord that he outran Ahab's chariot as they raced toward Jezreel.

8: Sin brings death: Romans 6:23

The people witnessed and expressed what Elijah knew well – "The LORD, he is God!" The fire that consumed the soaked sacrifice and the rain that watered the dry earth both revealed the undeniable power of Almighty God. Elijah trusted God to meet his needs and show His power. His boldness was not the product of human strength, but a demonstration of power from heaven above. **God powerfully provides for those who stand with Him.**

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

God raised up the prophet Elijah to confront evil and idolatry in the northern kingdom of Israel. He stepped into Israel's story under the reign of the notoriously wicked King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. Baal worship, immorality, and rejection of God pervaded the kingdom. Elijah appeared as God's representative before King Ahab to announce a severe drought in Israel. Fleeing for his own protection, Elijah experienced God's tender care in moments of desperate need. He enjoyed unexpected provisions at the brook, from the ravens, and in the form of a destitute widow, an empty jar of flour, and a depleted jug of oil. These timely expressions of God's faithfulness prepared Elijah to trust God when the stakes were high. God met Elijah's needs and developed his faith through surprising and humbling ways.

At Mount Carmel, Elijah experienced God's power in a public display of bold faith. Though vastly outnumbered by pagan priests, Elijah stood boldly with and for God. The prophets of Baal were proven powerless as God Almighty sent down fire to consume Elijah's sacrifice and poured out needed rain in answer to Elijah's prayer. This unmistakable demonstration of God's power was a merciful invitation for God's people to return to Him. God again proved Himself powerful and trustworthy to His faithful servant Elijah.

Apply It

Do you feel like God's voice and the influence of Christians is being silenced in today's world? Believers are marginalized, persecuted, and martyred in a world that seems to have rejected God. The culture of our current day has become so combative that any voice speaking for God and His ways is attacked. Elijah's amazingly relevant story offers hope. God raised him up as the lone voice of truth amidst a culture that had turned away from God. The light of God that shined powerfully through Elijah was stronger than the darkness that surrounded him. Are you the only believer in your family, neighborhood, or workplace? Does it seem like evil is winning when you read the daily news? Elijah's story and the final chapters of the Bible remind us that God wins. **Sin's darkness will never extinguish God's light.** Remember that even if we are humanly alone, with God we reside in a majority. There is no reason to be consumed with or motivated out of fear. God has us in His hands. In what way will you choose to stand with God, even if it means standing against the crowd?

We are needy. Despite our best attempts to convince ourselves and others that we are self-sufficient, life reveals our weaknesses at every turn. Elijah had to depend on God to meet his everyday necessities of food and water – the basics of life. God did not provide Elijah with a warehouse of supplies. Instead, He sent him a daily allotment from a source that was visibly inadequate. God's resources

were only abundant through the eyes of faith. What situation in your life is opening your eyes to your own neediness? How is this awareness of neediness producing spiritual gain in your life? When has God sent you to a humbling place to demonstrate His sufficiency? **God crafts situations in our lives that unveil our needs to teach us to depend on Him.** He dispenses grace and provision in divinely measured doses that satisfy our true needs and give Him glory. God's provisions and guidance usually require ongoing, moment-by-moment dependence on His tender care. We need God. The good news is that He is absolutely sufficient.

Elijah's confidence in God amazes us. His courageous confrontation of the prophets of Baal reveals an almost unbelievable faith and boldness. Was he uniquely gifted? Was he unusually brave? Elijah was a regular person with normal fears and growing faith. In next week's lesson we will see Elijah's very human response to this exhilarating but exhausting encounter. The bottom line is that God uses ordinary people in extraordinary ways. God's battles are not won in human strength. Perhaps you think your Christian life is fairly lackluster compared to Elijah's Mount Carmel moment. However, spiritual success is not measured by external fireworks but by a steady heart of obedience and faithfulness. What can you trust God for today as He cares for you spiritually? **God wants to use you in ways for which He has uniquely suited and positioned you.** Follow God wholeheartedly, and trust Him with the results that are uniquely remarkable in your life and circumstances. In what way is God leading you to courageously trust Him?

All Scripture quotations in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ® NIV ®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Elijah's Crisis and Israel's Calamities

1 Kings 19–21

Lesson Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 4 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What truth from the lecture led you to seek God's presence and help during a challenge this past week?

2. How did the notes help you realize that, like Elijah, God has positioned you to be used for Him? What will you do?

Second Day: Read 1 Kings 19:1-10.

Elijah ran from Jezebel in fear for his life.

3. What did Elijah experience after his great victory at Mount Carmel (see 1 Kings 18:16-46)?

© BSF 2022 (This material may be downloaded from mybsf.org and used by BSF class members in connection with their personal BSF class studies. It may not be otherwise reproduced without BSF's written permission.)

4. a. How did God care for His exhausted and discouraged servant?

   b. In what ways have you experienced God's provisions during a time of need or suffering?

5. What did God ask Elijah at Mount Horeb, and how did Elijah answer?

6. Give lessons that you draw from Elijah's experience.

Third Day: Read 1 Kings 19:11-21.

God lovingly restored Elijah.

7. a. Describe the ways God revealed Himself to Elijah. What stands out to you?

   b. What do you think God intended for Elijah to experience and learn?

8. a. How did God move Elijah forward in work for Him? What did He ask Elijah to do?

   b. Why would God's calling of Elisha have been particularly helpful to Elijah?

9. In what specific ways has God called and sustained you in obedience and service for Him?

Fourth Day: Read 1 Kings 20.

God rescued Ahab and Israel from Ben-Hadad's overpowering army.

10. Explain how God protected His people and His promises despite their sin.

11. a. What verses clearly state God's purpose in rescuing His people yet again?

    b. In what ways have you seen God rescue you?

12. Even after experiencing God's deliverance, what poor decision did Ahab make?

13. a. How did Ahab respond to God's judgment?

    b. Tell some of the ways God has used the consequences of your sin to call you to a deeper relationship with Him.

Fifth Day: Read 1 Kings 21.

Ahab and Jezebel selfishly abused their power.

14. Describe the character of each of the following persons in this passage:
    a. Ahab

b. Jezebel

c. Naboth

15. a. How did God respond to Ahab and Jezebel's evil?

b. How did Ahab respond to God's judgment? Do you think he was sincere?

16. a. Give examples of God's grace from this account.

b. What evidence of God's grace have you experienced this week?

Sixth Day: Review 1 Kings 19–21.

God generously extends grace to the faithful and the unfaithful.

17. What attribute of God stands out to you in 1 Kings 19–21? How do you see that attribute displayed in the world today?

Passage Discovery (homiletics, word study, etc.) for Group and Administrative Leaders: 1 Kings 19–21

Lecture Notes

Next step: Read Lesson Notes.

Lesson Notes

1 Kings 19–21

Focus Verse

"The LORD said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.'" – 1 Kings 19:11a

Outline

- God's Generous Grace to a Weary Servant – 1 Kings 19
- God's Generous Grace to a Rebellious King – 1 Kings 20–21

Engage

We live in a world that idolizes superheroes. The idea of unfaltering invincibility appeals to us. We like to imagine ourselves stronger than we actually are. So what happens when our human fragility surfaces? Life sometimes leaves us struggling to breathe. We face fears, illness, and the stresses of life. Ongoing pressure leaves us depleted and weary. There is good news. Even though our strength might wane, God's strength never does! Our Heavenly Father understands our weaknesses better than we do. His own Son walked the soil of earth as a man. **God can be trusted to sustain us when our strength fails.**

Elijah confronted an evil king and rampant idolatry with seemingly superhuman strength. He trusted God in big ways. Yet after a spectacular display of courageous faith, God's weary servant collapsed. Elijah experienced yet another hue of God's multicolored faithfulness when his human frailty was exposed. The God who fed him with ravens and sent fire from heaven met him in the pit of despair. God tenderly restored Elijah. He then gave him more work to do. Human limitations do not limit God. Elijah would again stand before rebellious Ahab to deliver God's message. **God generously extends grace to the faithful and the unfaithful.** God's grace is essential. God's grace is powerful.

God's Generous Grace to a Weary Servant – 1 Kings 19

God's prophet Elijah boldly confronted evil. He crashed into King Ahab's presence and declared God's coming judgment in the form of a drought.[1] He called down fire from heaven in a dramatic display of God's overwhelming power. Elijah slew 450 prophets of Baal.[2] He prayed, then God opened the heavens to send rain on Israel.[3] Elijah had experienced God's provisions and power in miraculous ways. **Now, after monumental victory, God's exhausted servant faced a new kind of battle.**

1: Coming drought: 1 Kings 17:1
2: Prophets of Baal: 1 Kings 18:16-40
3: Rain: 1 Kings 18:41-46

Elijah's Crisis – 19:1-10

A Weary Servant – 19:1-5a

Jezebel's Threat – 19:1-2

God's unmistakable display of power threatened the perceived power of a wicked queen. The stronghold of evil had been shaken. Jezebel sent a twisted threat to God's faithful but depleted servant, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them." Surely if Jezebel could send a message to Elijah, she could have ordered his murder immediately. Satan used her threat to torment Elijah with an outcome that God's sovereign plan for him would not allow.

Elijah's Response – 19:3-5a

The courageous prophet who had unflinchingly confronted King Ahab was now consumed by debilitating fear. The man of God who faced down 850 false prophets ran scared at the threat of one woman. Elijah fled first to Beersheba and then to the desert. His journey probably totaled 90 miles (145 kilometers). Alone and defeated, Elijah sat down under the shade of a broom bush, prayed to die, and fell asleep.

Elijah's sudden plunge into despair might surprise us, but his raw humanity should not. The glaringly honest words that poured out of Elijah revealed the depth of his inner strife. "I have had enough, LORD ... Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." **Elijah was just as human as we are.** Like any Christian who has experienced an intense spiritual battle, Elijah was physically, mentally, and spiritually exhausted. Even though he was drained and defeated, he was honest with God.

Elijah's very real struggle offers many lessons for us. Internal and external pressure, hunger, physical strain, and general weariness can take us to a place where we feel we have nothing left to offer God or anyone else. We face many moments when we have "had enough." **Satan aims his attacks on believers at specific times and points of vulnerability.** Our enemy flings accusations at us with precise cruelty, but he cannot steal the permanent shelter given to us by our God Most High.[4] "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed" (2 Corinthians 4:8-9).

Great victories are often followed by moments of extreme distress. Even great men and women of God face human limitations and discouragement. **By God's grace, His work does not depend on our invincibility.** Seasons of excruciating pain prove to us that we need God. He is sufficient.

God's Restorative Care – 19:5b-10

Practical Provisions – 19:5b-9a

Perhaps we are tempted to condemn or criticize Elijah – just a little bit. Had he not just seen God do amazing things? Even though we struggle with the same kind of human limitations that Elijah did, we often expect unrealistic perfection in ourselves and others. God's response to Elijah, however, was restorative and not condemning. He did not rebuke Elijah for unbelief or for forgetting His former

---

4: Sheltered by God: Psalm 91

care. He did not see Elijah's desperate moment as failure. **God knew Elijah had a false sense of isolation and responded to his human frailty with gentleness and practical help.**

God gave Elijah what he needed – sleep and food. An angel touched sleeping Elijah and gave him bread and water. He ate and drank and lay down again. A second time, the angel awakened him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." **God strengthened Elijah and supplied what he needed most.** The rest and nourishment He provided energized Elijah to travel for 40 days and nights to Mount Horeb. When Elijah arrived there, he entered into a cave to spend the night.

God completely understands our human limitations. He is never surprised when we become weary. God knows what is too much for us. We do not have the resources to navigate life or please God on our own. We cannot figure out anything significant without His help. In so many ways, God says, "I know what you really need, and I will give it to you if you trust Me." Life's darkest moments are designed to teach us to depend on God.

Honest Confession – 19:9b-10

God's first direct words to Elijah came as a searching question, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" **With gentle purposefulness, God encouraged Elijah to speak to Him concerning his questions, doubts, fears, and deep loneliness.** God lovingly prodded Elijah forward, helping him move beyond his state of paralyzed despair.

Elijah held nothing back. He honestly poured out his utter loss of hope to God. He had been zealous and faithful. The people had rejected God and killed His prophets. **Elijah believed that he was the only one left standing for Almighty God – and now they were trying to kill him.** Elijah's work felt fruitless, and he felt defeated.

Elijah's Comfort – 19:11-14

God knew just how to minister to His beloved and weary prophet. With clarifying direction, God instructed Elijah to go out on the mountain and get ready – "the LORD is about to pass by." **With the full force of nature at His bidding, God reminded Elijah of His power with three unmistakable expressions.** In a terrifying and vibrant pageant displaying His power, God first unleashed a great and powerful wind that shattered the rocks on the mountain. Then came an earthquake and then a fire. And yet, God was not in the mighty wind, the forceful earthquake, or the blazing fire.

Elijah's ear heard something else as the noise of nature faded. "And after the fire came a gentle whisper." He covered his face with his cloak as he stood aware of God's presence. **God's message to Elijah would not be offered in a big noisy way, but in the still, quiet voice of a loving Father.** God tenderly and gently repeated the same question – "What are you doing here, Elijah?" For a second time, Elijah told God of his lonely plight of faithfulness. The sad songs of life can be honestly sung to our Heavenly Father who loves us best. We look for God in the moments of life that are big and loud. What is God whispering to you today?

Elijah's story presents a real picture of the human experience. The uncertainties of life weigh heavily on us. **Our human strength will fail us, but God never does.** In the midst of life's challenges, God welcomes our honest expressions about the depth of our struggles. Only He knows and can meet our deepest needs. We gain strength to carry on as we fix our gaze on the greatness of God rather than the magnitude of our problems. God orchestrates our circumstances to remove our illusion of

strength and help us look to Him. In God's strength alone, we can rise from the hard places in life to carry on and move forward. God does not strengthen us just so we can be strong again. He wants us to re-engage with the work He is doing in the world.

Elijah's Calling – 19:15-18

God did not allow His faithful servant to remain sidelined but enlisted him with specific work to do. God leads us to know the right next thing to do even when life is hard. **God answered Elijah with clear-cut words of direction and comfort.**

- **Anoint two kings** – Hazael was to be crowned as king of Aram[5] and Jehu as king of Israel.[6]
- **Anoint Elisha as your successor** – God's work among the people of Israel would continue.
- **Be encouraged, you are not alone** – There are 7,000 in Israel who have refused to bow to Baal.

God called Elijah to speak boldly for Him as His prophet in Israel. In a similar way, God calls every Christian to partner with Him in His ongoing work in the world. **God comes alongside believers when they are weak to give them the strength needed to carry on for His purposes and give Him glory.**

On Mount Horeb, God confirmed His control of nations and His sovereignty over His people. **Elijah's work for God was not done.** God assigned Elijah immediate tasks that carried great importance. He would anoint kings to carry forth God's plan for rebellious Israel. King Hazael would come as a bitter enemy. The sword of Jehu would reap vengeance on Israel. Elisha would continue to stand with God and against evil. God's plan for His people was not defeated.

Elijah's Comrade – 19:19-21

Elijah journeyed to find Elisha, whose home was likely in Abel-Meholah, a significant trip from Mount Horeb. **Elijah found his successor hard at work.** Elisha was plowing and leading a work force involving 12 pairs of oxen.

With his characteristic abruptness, Elijah threw his cloak around Elisha and kept on walking. This was not just any cloak but an official mantle that identified him as a prophet. Evidently, Elisha knew what was happening. He recognized Elijah's action as a call to follow him. **Elisha responded to God's call, and his life was changed forever.** With Elijah's permission, Elisha returned to kiss his parents goodbye. He verified his commitment by slaughtering his oxen and burning the tools of his trade. Elisha held nothing back in his commitment to God.

God had great work in store for Elisha as he became Elijah's servant. Over time, God gave Elisha a powerful ministry of his own. What a privilege he had to walk alongside this renowned prophet of God. Elisha was filled with power to boldly proclaim truth. He performed compassionate miracles in God's name. **God revealed His compassion through the promise that His work would continue as He provided Elisha to walk with Elijah.** The bonds formed by those who work together for the Lord are among life's greatest treasures.

5: King Hazael: 2 Kings 10:32
6: Jehu: 2 Kings 9:1-3

The Painful Path to Spiritual Growth

The Doctrine of Suffering

Life in a broken world brings pain in many varieties. Our human experience can involve physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual distress. Suffering entered the world when Adam and Eve fell into sin, and sin's curse corrupted the natural world, including the people of earth.[7] Some suffering is the direct result of personal or societal sin.[8] Much pain, however, represents the natural consequences of sin's broad damage. Life on planet Earth includes natural disasters, aging bodies, global pandemics, and strained relationships.[9] Grief and anguish regularly invade human lives. Like Elijah, even God's faithful servants suffer.

Suffering accomplishes God's sovereign and good purposes.[10] Some of our pain comes as God's loving discipline, to correct and perfect us.[11] Times of suffering often reveal our human limitations and our utter dependence on God. Suffering challenges people to face their own mortality and human limitations, even if they fail to turn to God.

We often struggle to explain the hardship we face. **While we cannot adequately document God's every motive in the suffering He allows, He can be trusted.** The pain that is our regular fare in this fallen world makes us long for the day when Jesus will end sin's devastation and will reign on the earth without rival.[12] The fact that God allows suffering does not mean He does not love us. In the ultimate expression of His love, God allowed His own Son to experience bitter suffering on the cross.[13] Jesus suffered so that all who turn to Him can eagerly anticipate a day when this world's suffering will end.

This world's trouble is difficult to explain without a biblical perspective on suffering's source and purpose. If we do not recognize the relationship between human suffering and sin, we might question God's goodness. **If we fail to recognize God and His redeeming purposes, the pain seems pointless.** We are left with only throbbing pain we must endure but cannot reconcile. Where is the hope without Jesus?

Your suffering offers a personal invitation to trust the Lord. Jesus warned that living a countercultural lifestyle in this world would bring suffering. He suffered in ways we cannot fully describe. We are called to seek God's purpose and experience His peace in the midst of our pain. John 16:33 says, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." What is the most painful situation you face today? Are you willing to trust God with the pain, even if you cannot explain His purpose in it?

7: Sin's curse: Genesis 3; Romans 3:10-18; 5:12
8: God's judgment on sin: Joel 2:12-14; Romans 1:18-32
9: Trouble in this world: 1 Peter 1:6-7
10: God's purposes: Isaiah 45:7
11: God's discipline: Genesis 50:19-20; Proverbs 3:12; Romans 5:1-5; 8:28; Philippians 3:7-10
12: Delivered from suffering: Revelation 21:3-5
13: Suffering servant: Isaiah 53

God's Generous Grace to a Rebellious King – 1 Kings 20–21

God faithfully supported Elijah, but He also persistently reached out to King Ahab and Israel. Ahab reigned 22 years in Israel as an evil king who perpetuated evil in unprecedented ways.[14] Despite this, God continually confronted Ahab, speaking through multiple prophets and demonstrations of His power.

God's Rescue – 1 Kings 20

War with Ben-Hadad of Aram – 20:1-34

God sent enemies against Ahab's kingdom to draw His people back to Himself. **Ben-Hadad, the king of Aram (modern-day Syria), formed a powerful coalition of 32 kings and besieged Israel's capital, Samaria.** Ahab agreed to pay a hefty price and even offered some of his own family in an effort to save the city. But when Ben-Hadad demanded full search and seizure of the city, Ahab and his officials refused.

In generous grace, God sent an unnamed prophet with a message for Ahab. He declared that God would give victory over the enemy so that Ahab and his people would know that "I am the LORD." **Ahab followed God's direction, and his forces decisively triumphed over his enemies in the battle.**

Despite his undeniable experience of God's deliverance, Ahab valued political and economic gain more than pleasing God. He not only spared his enemy Ben-Hadad, but he made him a trading partner and ally. This diplomatic human solution came with great future consequences – the Arameans would be back for more battle and bloodshed.[15]

Warning by God's Prophet – 20:35-43

God continually reached out to Ahab, who persisted in resistance. God delivered a message of judgment to Ahab through a strange encounter with an unnamed prophet. Ahab and his people would serve the death sentence intended for Ben-Hadad due to Ahab's release of this enemy king. God does not overlook sin. The consequences for disobedience remained. Ahab, at this moment, could have chosen repentance. Instead, he returned to his palace in sullen anger. **Serious consequences follow when a hardened human heart fails to respond to God's compassion and grace.**

God's Judgment – 1 Kings 21

A Flagrant Sin – 21:1-16

The self-centered values and motives of Ahab and Jezebel erupted into evil actions. Ahab desired a vineyard near his palace that was owned by a man named Naboth. **When Naboth refused Ahab's**

14: Ahab's evil: 1 Kings 16:29-30; 21:25-26
15: Future battles: 1 Kings 22:31; 2 Kings 6:8-24

offer to purchase the land through an exchange or sale, Ahab again returned home sullen and angry. Naboth stood firmly on the standards in God's law. He had every legal right to refuse to sell the king the land that was his rightful inheritance.[16]

Queen Jezebel noticed Ahab's depressed state as he sulked in bed and refused to eat. She launched an underhanded plan to get the vineyard for Ahab. Naboth was sentenced and stoned to death because of his uncompromised devotion to what was right. Naboth's sons were also killed so that no family remained to inherit the property.[17] **Ahab seized the vineyard in a flagrant and evil abuse of power.** His misdeeds continued to escalate. Psalm 53:4 describes evildoers as those who "devour my people as though eating bread." Ahab's treachery against Naboth did not escape God's notice.

God, who exercises His unlimited power with purity and perfection, will eventually bring judgment on all those who abuse power and people.

A Fearful Warning – 21:17-26

God again sent Elijah to oppose Ahab. Greeted by Ahab as his enemy, Elijah delivered a solemn verdict of judgment. Ahab had provoked God and led Israel astray with his sins of idolatry, oppression, and violence. **The royal dynasty of Ahab and Jezebel would face a disgraceful end.**

The injustice and oppression in our world often cause people to doubt God's power and goodness. Though not all of God's judgment is delivered swiftly, it is nonetheless certain. **God sees everything and hates the exploitation of the weak.**[18] This has never changed. God, who exercises His unlimited power with purity and perfection, will eventually bring judgment on all those who abuse power and people.

Undeserved Mercy – 21:27-29

Ahab had a position of great influence. **Despite God's clear and repeated calls to Ahab to do what was right, Jezebel spurred her husband on to unrelenting evil.** The fire that fell at Mount Carmel, the decisive rescue in battle, and personal appeals from God had not softened his hard heart. Would anything be different this time?

After Elijah's somber announcement, Ahab put on sackcloth to express sorrow and humility. God pointed Elijah to Ahab's unexpected response. Despite Ahab's record of excessive evil, God acknowledged his fleeting moment of humility. **God extended mercy to the degenerate, murderous, and reprobate King Ahab.** The just consequences of Ahab's sin would not fall until the days of his son. God was amazingly gracious to Ahab himself, though his son was left with the fallout caused by his sin and rebellion.

This passage reveals God's wisdom in dispensing grace. God tenderly dealt with Elijah in a moment of human frailty. God persistently pursued Ahab despite a lifetime of evil. **God generously extends grace to the faithful and the unfaithful.** We worship a God who delights to show mercy to the undeserving.

16: Naboth's inheritance: Leviticus 25:23; Numbers 26:55-56; 36:7-9
17: Naboth's sons: 2 Kings 9:26
18: Abuse of power: Leviticus 19:33-34; Proverbs 6:16-19; Isaiah 61:8; Amos 2:6-7

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

After his dramatic victory over the prophets of Baal, Elijah fled in fear when wicked Queen Jezebel vowed to kill him. Exhausted and discouraged, Elijah sat under a bush and prayed to die. With compassionate care, the angel of the Lord restored His faithful but weary servant. Elijah honestly poured out his questions and expressed the depths of his personal struggle to God. He had been faithful to God's commands. He was fatigued, and his ministry felt fruitless. He felt forsaken and alone. God revealed His powerful presence and gentle care to Elijah. Commissioned by God to new work, Elijah did the next right thing. He emerged to anoint kings and raised up Elisha as a faithful partner and his successor. **God faithfully cared for Elijah when he faced real human struggles.** Human strength fails, but God's faithfulness prevails.

King Ahab continued to reject God, despite many opportunities to turn to Him. Throughout Ahab's reign, God faithfully sent prophets to give direction and timely warnings. Even though Ahab and Israel experienced victory in battle by God's power alone, he continued to serve himself, not God. Ahab's evil only escalated. He abused power and murdered Naboth to steal Naboth's vineyard for his own pleasure. However, evil does not go unchecked. Elijah again stood before this reprobate king to pronounce the end of his kingdom. In response to Ahab's show of humility, the disaster was delayed until the reign of his son. God extends mercy to the undeserving even as He exercises judgment.

Apply It

God regularly allows His children opportunities to recognize how much we need Him. He did this for Elijah. He does it for us. We often resist moments that reveal weakness to ourselves and others. We fail to recognize that we need God just as much on the days we feel strong as on the days we struggle. God exposes our humanness to reveal the truth. Psalm 103:13-14 says, "As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust." Our weakness is not news to God. He understands the limitations of the mortals He formed from dust. We, however, struggle to shed our illusion of superpowers. Will you trust that God has made you weak in all the right places to shine His glory through the cracks in your clay pot?[19] What is God revealing as He tenderly teaches you to trust Him? How is God purposefully exposing your weakness to draw you to Himself?

Elijah's story presents lessons for us, but so does Ahab's. **Persistent refusal to yield to God's loving invitations reaps serious consequences.** God revealed His power and accessibility to Ahab by giving him victory in battle. He repeatedly sent His representatives to speak truth to this headstrong king. Surely we would never be as foolish as Ahab! Admittedly however, there are ways we also resist God's loving appeals to us. How can you develop a heart that is sensitive to the Lord and pliable in His hands? The "Ahab factor" at work in us limits our responsiveness to God. Do you recognize the conviction and guidance of the Holy Spirit? How quickly do you repent when God reveals sin? Lord, soften our hearts and unblock our ears! May God's voice and loving appeals matter more than our pride.

19: Treasure in clay pot: 2 Corinthians 4:7-9

God's mercy is relentless; His grace flows in a steady stream.[20] He upholds faithful but frail people like Elijah. God reaches out to obstinate people like Ahab. He avenged the evil inflicted on Naboth. God offers hope and calls us to trust Him. His persistent and loving presence permeates our world and our lives. What specific expressions of God's lavish mercy and generous grace flood your life story? How has God met you this week? What people has God sent to you with timely and customized words of warning or encouragement? God calls us to seek Him and sustains us as we do. The glory is all His. We are but dust. Isaiah 64:8 says it well, "Yet you, LORD, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand." God can be trusted to form the dust in you into something beautiful. Will you trust Him?

20: Mercy and grace: Psalm 25:6; Lamentations 3:22-24

All Scripture quotations in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ® NIV ®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Israel's Kings: Turning Away From God

1 Kings 22 – 2 Kings 1

Lesson Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 5 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What specific thoughts in the notes helped you seek God's deeper purposes in something you faced this past week?

2. How did you hear God's voice in the lecture? What truth was particularly meaningful to you?

Second Day: Read 1 Kings 22:1-28.

King Ahab of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah sought guidance regarding allying in battle against the Arameans.

3. Describe the alliance between Ahab and Jehoshaphat (see 2 Chronicles 18:1-3).

© BSF 2022 (This material may be downloaded from mybsf.org and used by BSF class members in connection with their personal BSF class studies. It may not be otherwise reproduced without BSF's written permission.)

4. a. In what ways did Ahab and Jehoshaphat disregard God's warning?

   b. What did Ahab seem to value in the advice he sought?

   c. In Ahab's exchange with Micaiah, what stands out to you?

5. What prompting of God are you tempted to overlook or ignore? What is God calling you to do today as an act of obedience?

Third Day: Read 1 Kings 22:29-40.

Ahab died in battle, despite his attempts to avoid God's decree of judgment.

6. How did Ahab enter this battle? What was the result?

7. Describe Jehoshaphat's experience in the battle (see 2 Chronicles 18:31-32).

8. a. What do you learn about God's sovereignty and dependability from these verses?

   b. How does this truth about God impact your life?

Fourth Day: Read 1 Kings 22:41-53.

God established Jehoshaphat as king in Judah; Ahaziah reigned in Israel.

9. How is Jehoshaphat's reign as Judah's king described?

10. How is Ahaziah's reign as Israel's king described?

11. a. Discuss the divergent direction of the two kingdoms. What do you learn?

    b. What do you learn about God through His response to the two kings and the two kingdoms?

12. How have you experienced God's grace this week, despite personal battles with sin and hard circumstances?

Fifth Day: Read 2 Kings 1.

God's judgment fell on Israel's King Ahaziah.

13. What happened in Ahaziah's life, and how did he respond?

14. a. What was Elijah's role in this passage?

b. Was Elijah harsh or Spirit-led? What questions or lessons arise for you from his encounter with the king's representatives?

15. What attitudes, words, or actions help you relate to people who resist God and His Word?

16. How has God proven Himself faithful and merciful when you have turned to Him?

Sixth Day: Review 1 Kings 22 – 2 Kings 1.

Refusing to seek God perpetuates deception and leads to destruction.

17. What is the most surprising or challenging thing you discovered this week?

Passage Discovery (homiletics, word study, etc.) for Group and Administrative Leaders: 1 Kings 22 – 2 Kings 1

Lecture Notes

Next step: Read Lesson Notes.

Lesson Notes

1 Kings 22 – 2 Kings 1

Focus Verse

"But Jehoshaphat also said to the king of Israel, 'First seek the counsel of the LORD.'" – 1 Kings 22:5

Outline

- Ahab Chose Deception Over Truth – 1 Kings 22:1-50
- Ahaziah Chose Not to Seek God – 1 Kings 22:51 – 2 Kings 1:18

Engage

How do you deal with the urge to put your interests and pleasure before others? Our opinions and preferences seem very important to us and are often the basis for our choices. What happens if what we like or want is not good for us? What if we believe something that is actually not true? Our own understanding is limited. Input from other people is similarly flawed. In every way, we need wisdom and insight beyond our own. At the end of the day, God's opinion is the only truth that matters. **We end up being deceived when we fail to seek God and His truth.**

In this week's lesson, we study two kings who deliberately chose their own way and rejected God. Ahab only liked people who said favorable things about him – even if it was not true. Ignoring the true God, Ahaziah sought answers from false gods. God and His truth cannot be dismissed or declined. **Refusing to seek God perpetuates deception and leads to destruction.** Our pride often feels manageable to us, but we do not often realize its pervasive danger. Pride wreaks havoc in every direction and destroys the abundant life God intends for us. May the severe warnings in this lesson lead us to humbly stand with God and follow Him.

Ahab Chose Deception Over Truth – 1 Kings 22:1-50

This lesson covers the final episode in Ahab's infamous reign over the kingdom of Israel. Ahab rejected God, encouraged idolatry, and oppressed the people he should have protected.[1] Ahab ignored multiple opportunities to turn to God. The prophet Elijah had pronounced judgment on Ahab for his multiplied sins.[2] When Ahab expressed humility in the moment, God mercifully promised to withhold the disaster until the days of his son.[3] **Ahab's life illustrates the danger of spurning God's mercy and ignoring His warnings.** He had been on the receiving end of God's

---

1: Ahab's evil: 1 Kings 16:29-33; 21:17-19
2: Ahab's sins: 1 Kings 18:16-19; 21:21-24
3: Judgment delayed: 1 Kings 21:27-29

mercy, but continued to live a rebellious life. The deception that characterized Ahab's life continued until the day of his death.

Ahab Pursued His Own Agenda – 1 Kings 22:1-28

Israel's Alliance With Judah – 1 Kings 22:1-4

Ahab and Israel had a history of conflict with the Arameans (or Syrians). God had graciously given Israel's armies victory over their much stronger enemy to prove His power and call them to Himself. Despite God's intervention, Ahab sought diplomatic peace with Ben-Hadad, king of Aram, rather than killing his enemy king as God intended.[4] **After three years of peace with the Arameans, Ahab sought to reclaim the frontier city of Ramoth Gilead that remained under Syrian control.**

The separation of God's chosen people into two distinct kingdoms – Israel and Judah – created a dynamic of conflict. However, at this point in their history, some cooperation and communication emerged between the two kingdoms who were connected through God's covenant with David.[5] **Despite Jehoshaphat's campaign to remove idolatry from Judah, he had allied himself with Ahab's idolatrous family by marriage.[6]** Intermarriage was a common means of cementing a political and economic alliance. In this case, this marriage alliance indicated lack of trust in the Lord and risked turning Judah's leaders away from the one, true God.[7]

King Jehoshaphat of Judah visited Ahab and Jezebel at the palace in Samaria. **With their marital alliance in place, Ahab now appealed to Jehoshaphat to lend military support to free Ramoth Gilead from Syrian control.** Jehoshaphat expressed his willingness to join in Ahab's plan saying, "I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses."

Ahab Consulted False Prophets – 1 Kings 22:5-28

Ahab's distorted agenda required false prophets with a convoluted message. His team of experts told him what he wanted to hear.

The False Message Ahab Preferred – 1 Kings 22:5-13

After agreeing to support Ahab in battle, Jehoshaphat wisely requested that they first "seek the counsel of the Lord." Jehoshaphat lingered on the slippery slope of compromise. With his history and pattern of following God, Jehoshaphat recognized the danger of proceeding without God's approval. He seemed to want both a partnership with Ahab and to remain faithful to God. Was this possible? Seeking the Lord acknowledges dependence on God, who alone determines the future. Doing the right thing the wrong way courts disaster.

Like anyone who seeks counsel from those who will agree with them, Ahab quickly summoned 400 false prophets who told him what he wanted to hear. They quickly offered the unified opinion that the Lord would grant success in the battle – Israel and Judah should proceed. Jehoshaphat discerned the absence of divine authority in the confirming chorus of the false prophets. He asked if any prophet remained who truly spoke for the Lord.

4: Ahab and the Arameans: 1 Kings 20:28-43
5: God's covenant people: 2 Samuel 7:16
6: Intermarriage with Ahab's family: 2 Chronicles 18:1
7: Alliances: Isaiah 30:1-5; 31:1-9

Ahab remembered one prophet, a man named Micaiah son of Imlah. He professed his hatred for this man because, "he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad." **Ahab so desired his own way that he hated anyone who opposed him.** Truth and reality took a back seat to feeding his own ego. His pride inflicted personal damage but also brought devastating consequences to others.

Jehoshaphat warned Ahab of the danger of his proud words, and Micaiah was summoned. The lone prophet of truth entered the threshing floor near the gate of Samaria, where the two kings sat adorned in royal robes on their thrones. The false prophet Zedekiah was offering a visual display with iron horns as he declared that their armies would gore the Arameans and destroy them. **In this setting where comfortable, positive-sounding lies held more value than unsettling truth, Micaiah was encouraged to "speak favorably" and agree with the declared victory.** He was coached on the right thing to say.

The True Message God Intended – 1 Kings 22:14-23

At first, Micaiah joined the rallying cry to attack the enemy, which is difficult to understand. Did he respond first in weariness, fear, or sarcasm? Scripture does not elaborate. What we do know is that when prodded further, Micaiah spoke the truth. "I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd, and the Lord said, 'These people have no master. Let each one go home in peace.'" **Micaiah's prophetic word predicted failure on the battlefield and indicted Ahab for his destructive leadership.** He described the confusion and disunity of the people of Israel, who fixed their eyes onto false gods and did not have a godly leader.

True to form, Ahab balked because Micaiah's statement of truth was not good for him. He refused to accept any word that did not conform to his plan. He preferred self-deception over God's truth. As humans, we can filter reality through our own grid and to our advantage. We choose self-deception when our interpretation and priorities run counter to God's revealed truth.[8]

Micaiah's vision expanded to include the majestic God on His throne, surrounded by multitudes. He also revealed that God allowed a deceiving spirit to lure Ahab into the battle. The same spirit spoke through these false prophets. **God orchestrated the choice for which Ahab was also responsible.** His sovereign plan delivered the judgment that His righteous ways prescribed.

The mystery of God's ways exceeds our understanding. **We can know that God is completely righteous, and that Ahab rejected every opportunity to do the right thing.** God never acts in an evil way. Everything God does is good.[9] His sovereign control mysteriously causes even evil beings and people to fulfill His ultimate good purpose. His perfect rule fully accomplishes His redemptive plan.

The Prophet Ahab Tried to Silence – 1 Kings 22:24-28

The false prophet Zedekiah slapped Micaiah in the face. With amazing resilience, God's prophet held his ground and took a bold stance for truth that landed him in prison. **Micaiah may have stood alone, but his words were true – fulfilled to the last letter.** Ahab put Micaiah in prison "until I return," yet Ahab never returned, just as Micaiah predicted. God's promised outcome prevailed.

Human beings often wrongly presume they have the option to define truth and control their reality. **Regardless of human interpretation and opinion, God's declarations always come to pass.** God's

---

8: Chosen deception: 2 Timothy 4:3-4
9: God's goodness: Psalm 119:68

Two Kingdoms – Parallel Stories

One of the challenges of this year's study includes balancing two separate storylines involving the events and kings in two separate kingdoms. **Our lessons and the scriptural accounts in Kings and Chronicles will sometimes alternate between a focus on the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah.** This week's lesson incorporates an event that involves Israel's King Ahab and his contemporary king in Judah, King Jehoshaphat. The primary focus in this week's study revolves around Ahab and Israel. Parallel accounts from 1 and 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles are listed in the references. Next week's lesson will dive deeply into the reign of Jehoshaphat in Judah.

people never need to fear standing alone among people when they stand with God. Jeremiah 1:12 says, "The LORD said to me, 'You have seen correctly, for I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled.'"

Ahab Defied God's Decree – 1 Kings 22:29-36

In spite of Micaiah's prophecy, Jehoshaphat and a disguised Ahab led their armies east toward Ramoth Gilead. Though the attacking soldiers could not recognize him, a "random" arrow slid beneath Ahab's armor to deliver a mortal wound. **The proud king who preferred deception over truth died while promoting a lie.** God's overruling plan remained evident, just as His purposeful control continues to be at work today.

Wily Ahab sent Jehoshaphat into the raging battle wearing his kingly robe, which made him a clear target for the enemy. In sharp contrast to Ahab, 2 Chronicles 18:31-32 records that Jehoshaphat cried out to the Lord for help when attackers prepared to kill him. Though Jehoshaphat made a foolish choice in aligning with Ahab, God mercifully spared his life. The Lord helped Jehoshaphat and drew attackers away from him. **The disguised king was hit by a random arrow; the fully robed king was spared despite a direct attack.** God was not fooled by Ahab's schemes.

Ahab Died as God Declared – 1 Kings 22:37-40

The sun set on Ahab's scattering soldiers and his wicked life. Even while in his chariot and bleeding out, Ahab stood facing the Arameans and attempted to look good. **The lie that Ahab propped up could not overcome God's declared truth.** He was brought back to Samaria and buried. His blood-drenched chariot was washed in a pool assigned to prostitutes. And just as God had said, the dogs licked his blood. These gruesome details witness to the truth that God's Word prevails.

God's solemn assessment of Ahab's legacy was delivered in the previous chapter. "There was never anyone like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the LORD, urged on by Jezebel his wife. He behaved in the vilest manner by going after idols, like the Amorites the LORD drove out before Israel" (1 Kings 21:25-26). **Ahab rejected God's merciful messages and His faithful messengers, but he could not reverse God's declared will.** Ahab's life presents a stern warning of the danger of rejecting God.

What God Says Will Happen – Will Happen

The Doctrine of Fulfillment of Prophecy

Ahab's attempts to dismiss and disregard God's revealed will and coming judgment proved futile. The deception he embraced could not change the truth God had declared. The Bible is full of prophecy – the reality and events that God has predicted before they happen. Hundreds of biblical prophecies have been fulfilled, and many more await fulfillment. What is the purpose of prophecy? Surely, God intends that His revelation of the future does far more than satisfy our curiosity. **God not only knows everything that will happen, but He also governs history to accomplish His desired will.**[10] Fulfilled prophecy gives evidence of God's involvement in our world. Our lives and world history are not spinning randomly toward an undefined conclusion. God has a plan.

The fulfillment of prophecy reveals that the attributes of God work in perfect harmony. Everything God predicts rises from His perfect goodness. Every act He performs accomplishes His greater purposes. We can see God's unlimited knowledge and unrestricted power at work in His plan. Our narrow view of an eternal landscape limits our understanding of the past, present, and future. We see just a slice of all that God perceives fully. He accomplishes what we could never imagine through circumstances we struggle to understand. The certainty of what God declares rests on His unchanging character. Biblical prophecy is grounded in God Himself. He gives us a glimpse of what is ahead so we will do right in the present. Prophecy heeded leads us to obey God and seek His way.

Fulfilled prophecy has value for us beyond being merely interesting or intriguing. The fact that what God predicted has actually happened testifies to His previousness and purposefulness in all things. Without this anchor, you are left to interpret life with an incredibly limited and earthbound perspective. You draw conclusions based only on what you know and can understand. The ponderings of this world's supposed experts offer your only hope to give you the grip on life that you so desperately need. God's trustworthiness is suspect without the tangible proof of fulfilled prophecy. **Without the certainty of God and His promises, life remains uncertain.**

God has not left you to scratch your head and wonder where this world is headed. **Though not all the details of the future are entirely clear, God has revealed enough to settle your heart and anchor your soul.** Before Jesus came to earth, God had revealed many facts about His coming and symbols of His mission that He perfectly fulfilled.[11] Every promise in God's Word is just as certain. Because God has proven that His Word and His promises are immovable, you can trust Him with the details of your life that seem less settled. Fulfilled prophecy offers "strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow."[a] Will you trust God to anchor and settle your anxious heart within His sovereign hands? What promise of God provides you hope today?

10: God's plans: Isaiah 46:9-10; 2 Peter 1:21
11: Fulfilled in Jesus: Matthew 5:17
a: Thomas Chisholm, "Great is Thy Faithfulness," music composed by William M. Runyan, 1923

Jehoshaphat's Reign in Judah – 1 Kings 22:41-50

This chapter includes an overview of Jehoshaphat's reign in Judah that we will explore next week. How encouraging that despite his failures, God's grace covered this king and his leadership. **There is much to learn from the glaring divide that separates those who value truth and seek God and those who do not.** There is much to learn about the folly of rejecting God and the wisdom of seeking Him.[12] In both cases, His faithfulness and sovereignty prevail.

Ahaziah Chose Not to Seek God – 1 Kings 22:51 – 2 Kings 1:18

Ahaziah's Evil and Elijah's Pronouncement – 1 Kings 22:51 – 2 Kings 1:8

When Ahab died, his son Ahaziah succeeded him on Israel's throne. He came to power in the 17th year of Jehoshaphat, his contemporary king in Judah. **Ahaziah reigned two years and perpetuated the evil of his father Ahab and mother Jezebel.** He aroused the anger of God by worshiping Baal.

Trouble soon invaded Ahaziah's life and kingdom. Moab rebelled against Israel. In addition to this diplomatic crisis, Ahaziah suffered severe injuries when he fell through the lattice in his palace. An already unstable kingdom now had a king whose physical condition hindered his leadership. This painful disaster early in his reign presented an opportunity to seek God. Humbled and bedridden, he knew his life and success as a king were in jeopardy. Ahaziah's response to his crisis was to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, to determine if he would recover from his injury. He deliberately rejected God as his source of life and hope.

The angel of the Lord sent Elijah to confront Ahaziah with a strong message. Because Ahaziah sought answers from an idol, catastrophe awaited the king and his people. Ahaziah disdained and rejected the one, true God. Elijah was to ask him the bottom-line question, "Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going off to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron?" God had called His people to singular devotion to Him. This grave offense brought serious consequences. Ahaziah would die on his bed.

Ahaziah's messengers met Elijah while on their journey. Elijah sent them back to the king with his strong rebuke and message of judgment. When the king's messengers described Elijah's hairy garments and leather belt, King Ahaziah knew who he was. **The prophet Elijah, who had so troubled his father, was now standing against him as well.**

Elijah's Power and Ahaziah's End – 2 Kings 1:9-18

Ahaziah sent three successive companies of 50 men to confront Elijah. The first two groups were consumed with fire – proving that God's authority rested on Elijah. Only when the final group begged for mercy did Elijah come down to visit the king. **Elijah pronounced God's judgment of**

12: Folly vs. wisdom: Proverbs 10:21

Baal-Zebub

Baal-Zebub's name means "Lord of the Flies." Some scholars believe the Hebrew narrator of 2 Kings changed the spelling from "Baal-Zebul," or "Exalted Lord," in order to dishonor this Philistine deity.[b] In the New Testament, Jesus used a variation of the name of this god as a term for Satan.[13] This likely suggests that demonic powers influenced the idols the people worshiped.[14]

imminent death on Ahaziah, who died just as God had determined. God's Word prevailed. The evil in Israel did not escape God's notice or His just judgment.

With every word of warning and expression of judgment, God patiently persisted in reaching out to His rebellious people. Often in dramatic ways, He demonstrated His heart to purify His people from idolatry and call them back to Himself. God's punishment was not purely vindictive but rather designed to reveal His power. He was unquestionably worthy of their single-hearted devotion. We can glean serious warnings from Ahab's evil reign and Ahaziah's short rule in Israel. **Refusing to seek God perpetuates deception and leads to destruction.** Only by seeking God and surrendering to Him can we find truth, hope, and rest.

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Ahab and Jezebel's reign of terror left deep scars on Israel's landscape. Scripture repeatedly applies superlatives to describe the evil that dominated Ahab's life and reign as Israel's king. If his evil choices were not bad enough, he repeatedly rejected God's gracious invitations to turn to Him in repentance. So wicked was his heart that he actually preferred lies to the truth. **With word and actions, Ahab proved that he hated God and His messengers while he loved himself supremely.** He sought only what his wicked mind perceived as favorable for himself. Even in his death, Ahab tried to perpetuate a lie and pursue his own agenda. God was not fooled by his self-deception. The evil king forfeited what God would have given him if he had truly humbled himself and turned from evil. He died a brutal death that broadcast the trustworthiness of God's Word. God's judgment prevailed.

Ahaziah continued in Ahab's pattern of evil. Even a debilitating injury did not soften his heart or lead him to seek God. **Ahaziah rejected the God who had faithfully shepherded Israel and instead sought a false god whose power came from Satan.** The faithful prophet Elijah declared that his offense against God would bring death. Like his father before him, Ahaziah's life was full of missed opportunities to turn to God. Just as God had said, Ahaziah died a broken man with a legacy of wasted opportunity and profound rebellion against God.

13: Beelzebul: Matthew 12:22-28
14: Demonic power: 1 Corinthians 10:20
b: Crossway Bibles, (2008). The ESV Study Bible (p. 646). Wheaton, IL; Crossway Bibles.

The depressing spiritual decline in the kingdom of Israel is difficult to read and absorb. As God's people, we also live in a world that mostly rejects God and spurns His Word. Spiritual compromise can infiltrate churches and Christian circles. How do we find hope? Against the dark backdrop of Israel's history, God's light continued to shine. Micaiah and Elijah spoke the truth to people who loved lies. Every intersection between God's good purposes and Israel's evil demonstrated His overcoming power. Lies cannot eradicate truth. **Evil may escalate, but God's purposes will always prevail.** Ultimately, God sent His Son into this world's darkness to save sinners. Therein, we find hope.

Apply It

We find it easy to condemn Ahab for his outright defiance of God. However, we need to let the warnings of this passage sink deeper into our hearts. Ahab chose lies over the truth. Do we ever do that? Satan, the masterful accuser, constantly calls us to agree with his lies in ways we fail to notice or that may seem harmless. When we fall prey to this thinking, we fail to fully believe what God has declared to be true. We then settle for a tame and casual walk with God that does not require bold faith or hardship. We wrongly believe that we can love God as long as doing so does not disrupt things too much. Walking in complacency, we increasingly believe the world's lies designed to make sin look normal and righteousness appear strange. We sometimes think that we cannot pray adequately or share the gospel effectively. We may not see these things as outright disobedience. However, so much is lost when we shrink back, settle, and fail to take a bold stand for Christ. **Our failure to seek God may not seem as overt as Ahab's, but it is more destructive than we imagine.** As God's children, we rebel against Him when we fail to believe and fully surrender to Him. This is always costly. God has so much more for us.

So how do we protect ourselves from the lies that regularly threaten to deceive us? How do we escape the pride that causes us to think too much about ourselves and far too little about God? What makes God and His truth so attractive that nothing else holds any allure? Fixing our minds and hearts on Christ is a first step.[15] God graciously offers us regular opportunities to turn to Him. We regularly come up empty against the demands of life. **Seeking God is the only thing that truly makes sense in this life.** Making much of God protects us from self-serving pride. In the shadow of His greatness, we humble ourselves and bow before Him. What situation is God allowing in your life to invite you to look up and follow Him? What will it look like for you to surrender to Him?

Ahab wanted God to conform to his predetermined agenda. Would we ever do this? Sometimes we think we know what God's plan for our lives should look like. We define God's will for us as having happy families, good-paying jobs, and relatively easy circumstances. Perhaps more realistically, we actually expect God to be on our side and conform to our ideas of His will. The problem with this approach is that when things do not go as we anticipate, we blame God or think He has abandoned us. What if, instead, you determined to trust God with whatever He allowed in your life? How will you respond if enemies surround you, illness steals your health, or you lose your livelihood or a loved one? Will you believe that God has determined a greater purpose in you, for you, and through you? Seeking God involves more than a verbal commitment and an illusion of surrender. **True surrender happens when we love the Lord more than ourselves and our plans.** The depth of our surrender is tested when God's ways do not conform to our plans. How is God calling you to surrender to Him? Will you follow Him?

15: Minds fixed on truth: Philippians 4:8; Colossians 3:1-11

Failure to yield to God indicates a wrong view of God and a deluded view of self. The seriousness of thinking that our puny perspectives are wiser than God's represents a serious and costly error. Before you go to sleep tonight, you will likely face something, big or small, where you will either trust God's truth or create your own. Will you ask God to show you His way and give you the courage and wisdom to trust Him?[16] We often think too much of ourselves and too little of God. **The God who rules eternity without rival is worthy of your trust today.**

16: Checking ourselves before God: James 1:5

All Scripture quotations in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ® NIV ®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Jehoshaphat's Reign in Judah

2 Chronicles 17:1–21:3

Lesson Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 6 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the lecture prepare or equip you for something you faced this week? What did you learn?

2. What from the notes led you to examine your own heart, motives, and actions before God?

Second Day: Read 2 Chronicles 17–19.

Jehoshaphat strengthened Judah with needed reforms.

3. a. From chapter 17, what specific steps did Jehoshaphat take to strengthen Judah practically and spiritually?

© BSF 2022 (This material may be downloaded from mybsf.org and used by BSF class members in connection with their personal BSF class studies. It may not be otherwise reproduced without BSF's written permission.)

b. How did God bless and establish Jehoshaphat's rule?

4. Last week's lesson focused on Ahab in his alliance with Jehoshaphat. From chapter 18, think about how that alliance impacted Jehoshaphat.

   a. What risks did Jehoshaphat take in this alliance?

   b. Despite his unwise decision to join Ahab in battle, how did God protect Jehoshaphat and show him mercy? (See also 2 Chronicles 19:1-3.)

   c. Has there been a time when you made an unwise decision? How did God show His grace to you?

5. a. How did Jehoshaphat challenge the judges appointed in Judah?

   b. What lessons from Jehoshaphat's words to the judges could you apply to your life?

Third Day: Read 2 Chronicles 20:1-13.

Jehoshaphat and Judah faced an overwhelming crisis.

6. Describe the troubling situation facing the people of Judah.

7. a. Name the specific ways Jehoshaphat responded to this crisis.

   b. What is your immediate response when you face unexpected calamity?

8. What stands out to you in Jehoshaphat's prayer before the people?

9. Describe a situation you are facing where you do not know what to do. How can you intentionally seek God?

Fourth Day: Read 2 Chronicles 20:14-30.

Jehoshaphat led Judah into battle, depending on God for deliverance.

10. How did God answer Jehoshaphat's prayer?

11. Name the truths about God that are exposed in the words of the prophet Jahaziel.

12. a. What do you learn from the way Jehoshaphat and Judah went into the battle?

    b. How can you thank and praise God now, even in the middle of a challenge that has not yet been resolved?

Fifth Day: Read 2 Chronicles 20:31–21:3.

Jehoshaphat's reign ended, and he was succeeded by his son Jehoram.

13. a. Was God's intervention in Jehoshaphat's ship-building alliance corrective, protective, or both?

b. In what situation has God intervened to redirect you away from danger or harm?

14. Give several lessons that you can learn from the life and reign of Jehoshaphat.

Sixth Day: Review 2 Chronicles 17:1–21:3.

Seeking God is the only way to have true security.

15. "We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you." How does Jehoshaphat's prayer help you this week?

Passage Discovery (homiletics, word study, etc.) for Group and Administrative Leaders: 2 Chronicles 17:1–21:3

Lecture Notes

Next step: Read Lesson Notes.

Lesson Notes

2 Chronicles 17:1–21:3

Focus Verse

"Our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you." – 2 Chronicles 20:12

Outline

- Jehoshaphat's Leadership – 2 Chronicles 17:1–20:30
- Jehoshaphat's Legacy – 2 Chronicles 20:31–21:3

Engage

As humans, we long to feel safe, settled, and secure. Despite this strong desire, so much in life seems uncertain. Even the little bit we think we have figured out can change quickly. Relationships, finances, world events, and so many things constantly shake our sense of equilibrium. Both unforeseen and expected life changes throw us off-balance. What do we do with a world that constantly shifts under our feet? Where do we look to find the stability and hope we need?

Judah's King Jehoshaphat was not a perfect king, but he led his kingdom well in many ways. We can learn something very important from this king. In a moment of crisis, Jehoshaphat turned to God. His honest confession, "We do not know what to do" accurately captures our frequent reality. What situation do you face today that requires a solution you do not have? Jehoshaphat did not know what to do, but he did know where to look for the answer. He declared to God, "our eyes are on you." He knew that God alone ruled heaven and earth and had the power to deliver his people from their enemy. There is but one place where we can receive what we truly need to navigate life and prepare for eternity. **Seeking God is the only way to have true security.** This world offers many options that promise the security we long for. Only God has what we need.

Jehoshaphat's Leadership – 2 Chronicles 17:1–20:30

The focus of this year's study shifts frequently between the kingdom of Judah and the kingdom of Israel. Last week's lesson included a grim account of life within the northern kingdom of Israel. Kings Ahab and Ahaziah rebelled against God. They refused to seek Him, even in moments of desperate need. **Israel's idolatry and denial of God brought continual discord within the kingdom and led to disastrous results.** The serious consequences of turning away from God stand as a stark warning for us.

This week's passage turns to Jehoshaphat, the contemporary king in Judah. He reigned for 25 years – concurrently with Ahab, Ahaziah, and Joram in Israel. The son of Asa, he continued the royal line God promised David that led to the Messiah. Last week's lesson briefly introduced Jehoshaphat as he made unwise alliances with Ahab – first in marriage and then by joining forces in battle. God graciously spared Judah's king and continued to offer Jehoshaphat opportunities to turn to Him. **Jehoshaphat deliberately sought God – a sharp contrast to the refusal of Israel's kings to seek God.**

A Kingdom Strengthened by Reforms – 17:1–19:11

Military Reinforcements – 17:1-2

Jehoshaphat started strong as Judah's king, both spiritually and practically. Early in his reign, he built up the nation by stationing **troops in all of Judah's fortified cities to protect his people from their enemies.** His decisive action in a time of peace prepared Judah against any military aggression from other nations.

Spiritual Foundations – 17:3-9

With a heart devoted to the Lord, Jehoshaphat took decisive action against the strongholds of idolatry within Judah. He removed the "high places" or ancient areas of false worship. He also tore down poles dedicated to the Canaanite fertility goddess Asherah. Work for God involves recognizing and confronting evil so truth and freedom can flourish.

Jehoshaphat also took deliberate steps to elevate a focus on God and His law throughout the land. He put an organized plan in motion to teach God's Word to the people of Judah. Jehoshaphat sent officials into Judah's towns, along with Levites and priests, to teach God's law to the people. This helped the people embrace God's standards as their own. Even today, we do not learn about God and His ways by chance. God arms His people with His Word. He sends them to specific places to speak and reach people for Him.

Political Interactions – 17:10–19:3

Success – 17:10-19

As God blessed Judah, the fear of the Lord fell on surrounding kingdoms. The Philistines and Arabs gave Jehoshaphat lavish gifts. No one initiated war with Judah. This time of peace and favor came as a blessing from God's hand.

Entanglements – 18:1–19:3

Jehoshaphat allied with King Ahab of Israel during a time of peace and prosperity. The details and results of that decision were covered last week in Ahab's account. Intermarriage between Jehoshaphat's and Ahab's families opened the door to a relationship that came with trouble. Jehoshaphat visited Ahab at his palace, mingled with him socially, and involved his nation in Ahab's war. Any economic or political gains he may have imagined from the arrangement escalated into challenges he should have avoided.

Jehoshaphat's side of the story in 2 Chronicles teaches us important lessons. We never reach a point where we have sufficient human wisdom to operate without God's continuous help. Times of success and prosperity warrant caution. While some God-directed compromise can be good, we must guard against the temptation to compromise our core values. Jehoshaphat's partnership with evil King Ahab flirted dangerously with reintroducing the idolatry he sought to eradicate from Judah. Jehoshaphat was not without godly influence in his dealings with Ahab. However, his suggestion to seek the Lord regarding the decision about going to war met strong resistance. In the end, Jehoshaphat risked his life in a battle that he should not have fought. **Unwise compromise is costly.**

After Jehoshaphat returned safely to Jerusalem, God sent a seer – or prophet – named Jehu with a word of rebuke. This encounter reveals God's persistent pursuit of the wholehearted devotion of His people. Jehu asked Jehoshaphat, "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord?" There are indeed ways God intends for His people to practically love those who hate the Lord. How do believers reach out to unbelievers without risking compromise before God? This remains challenging. In this case, Jehoshaphat risked all as he joined with an evil man who was God's avowed enemy. Only with wholehearted dependence on God at every step are believers able to avoid spiritual complacency.

Jehoshaphat's disobedience provoked God's wrath – His holy and measured response against sin. Along with the rebuke, however, the Lord's messenger also commended Jehoshaphat. Both God's grace and Jehoshaphat's flawed humanity are evident. **Despite his failures, God continued to prod Jehoshaphat forward in growth and obedience.**

Judicial Fortifications – 19:4-11

Jehoshaphat mobilized a system to uphold justice without partiality or bribery in Judah. He **positioned judges in each of Judah's fortified cities.** He commissioned them to recognize that they represented the Lord in every verdict they rendered. A justice system was also established in the city of Jerusalem. Levites, priests, and heads of families were appointed to settle disputes and warn people against sin. He charged them by saying, "Act with courage, and may the LORD be with those who do well."

Jehoshaphat put plans and people in place to protect his people. Good leadership requires more than responding and reacting. Proactive planning and strategy are also needed. The spiritual and practical changes Jehoshaphat put in place strengthened Judah.

A Battle Fought Through Prayer – 2 Chronicles 20:1-30

Times of ease and times of struggle challenge our faith in differing ways. **Jehoshaphat and his people faced a calamity that revealed their desperate need for God's intervention.**

An Unexpected Crisis – 20:1-2

After years of peace, a vast army gathered near En Gedi, about 25 miles (40 km) southeast of Jerusalem. **The Ammonites, Moabites, and Meunites gathered to attack Judah.**

A Heartfelt Cry for God's Help – 20:3-13

Private Prayer and Public Fasting – 20:3-4

Jehoshaphat turned to prayer, not battle plans. The alarm that gripped his heart led him to seek God for help. God allowed His people to feel their desperation and to learn to depend on Him. First, Jehoshaphat prayed personally. **A true spiritual leader is characterized by determination to seek God in prayer.**

Jehoshaphat also called the people in Judah to fast – to put other things aside to focus solely on seeking God in prayer. Their desperate situation called for passionate, united prayer. The people came together from all over Judah as their king humbly led them to pray for rescue.

Powerful Prayer – 20:5-13

The scene of the men, women, children, and little ones of the nation gathered and united to seek God is beautiful and inspiring. **Jehoshaphat stood before the people gathered in the temple courtyard to lead them in prayer to the living Lord.** His powerful prayer offers a powerful example for us.

Jehoshaphat Proclaimed God's Might – 20:6

Jehoshaphat boldly declared what was true about God. "LORD, the God of our ancestors, are you not the God who is in heaven?" He asked a question that deserved a resounding "yes!" God sits above the earth and reigns over its kingdoms and nations. "Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you." The kings and kingdoms that stood against Judah were subject to God's command and control. **Gazing at God puts our challenges in proper perspective.** Acknowledging God as big makes our problems seem small.

Jehoshaphat Recalled God's Past Faithfulness – 20:7

Jehoshaphat recounted God's past record of faithfulness to His people. God had driven out the Canaanites and delivered His people into the land He had promised them.[1] What God had done before, He could do again. The overwhelming enemy Judah now faced was no different and did not threaten God in any way. Taking time to verbalize specific examples of God's unrelenting faithfulness strengthens our faith.[2] **God's past faithfulness prepares us to trust Him with our present and future needs.** No matter how impossible the situation, knowing God is in control provides peace and strength.

Jehoshaphat Claimed God's Promise – 20:8-9

When Solomon led the people in prayer at the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem, he prayed for God's mercy on the people in a variety of situations. Here, Jehoshaphat pleaded with God to fulfill the promises made to Solomon.[3] United with his people, Jehoshaphat recited God's promises and called on Him to make that truth a reality in their current struggle. God's people stood in His temple, crying out to Him in their distress. Jehoshaphat confidently declared, "you will hear us and save us." **Believers appropriate God's promises in specific situations by actively trusting Him to do what He has promised to do.**

1: God's promises: Genesis 15:7, 18-19
2: Recounting God's faithfulness: Deuteronomy 2:7; Joshua 21:45; 1 Kings 8:56; Isaiah 63:7; Hebrews 11:1–12:3
3: Solomon's prayer enacted: 2 Chronicles 6:28-30

Jehoshaphat Acknowledged Their Helplessness – 20:10-12a

In the presence of the people, Jehoshaphat simply described their desperate situation to God. He acknowledged that they were powerless before such a great enemy. He honestly confessed, "We do not know what to do ..." Recognizing the reality of our helplessness and hopelessness apart from God represents a hard but healthy step. We often struggle to admit we do not have the strength, wisdom, or resources we need. **Only when we acknowledge the emptiness of our own hands are we ready to recognize the fullness of what God alone can do.**

Jehoshaphat Asked God for Help – 20:12b-13

Jehoshaphat followed his admission of need with a cry to God for help. His words, "... our eyes are on you," communicated both faith and expectancy. He did not dictate the exact outcome or methods God should use, but simply trusted Him to intervene on their behalf. Jehoshaphat deliberately took his eyes off the approaching army and put them on Almighty God. We stand ready to see God work when we fasten our gaze on Him and His overcoming power. God can be trusted, whether or not we experience an outcome we judge as victorious.

An Answer From on High – 20:14-17

We stand ready to see God work when we fasten our gaze on Him and His overcoming power. God can be trusted, whether or not we experience an outcome we judge as victorious.

God sent Jehoshaphat timely encouragement through the prophet Jahaziel. His message prepared the king and the people of Judah for the impending battle. God often lifts the spirits of His people through His Word in just the right way and at just the right moment.

"Do not be afraid or discouraged" – 20:15a

The people of Judah were to put off fear. The visible circumstances were not to dictate their confidence. As humans, we struggle with fear and discouragement. What fearful situation do you face? Throughout Scripture, God's people are repeatedly commanded to not be afraid.[4] Psalm 118:6 says, "The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?"

"For the battle is not yours, but God's" – 20:15b-17

God waged the war, and the people watched the victory. **As they stood firm and took their positions, God would deliver them.** The armed warriors would become mere spectators. God's presence and power would win two battles: the battle of fear within them and the battle against the enemy. Sometimes God engages His people on the battlefield. Other times, He calls them to stand back and watch Him work.

A Victory Declared, Then Won – 20:18-30

Humbled by God's grace and promises, Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah bowed down in worship. Some Levites stood up to praise the Lord with loud voices. God's promises of victory provided a deep awareness of His peace and confidence in His power even before they saw Him answer.

Early the next morning, the army left for the Desert of Tekoa. Jehoshaphat offered another call to faith. Singers led Judah's army into battle, praising God for the victory yet to be won. As they sang, the

---

4: Do not be afraid: Genesis 26:24; 46:3; Numbers 14:9; Deuteronomy 1:17; Joshua 1:9; 1 Samuel 23:17; Jeremiah 1:8; Matthew 10:26; Revelation 2:10

Heart-to-Heart Connection With Almighty God

The Doctrine of Prayer

Jehoshaphat cried out to God in the midst of a crisis. His prayer demonstrated honest communication between a needy person and a powerful God – on behalf of a needy kingdom. **Most simply, prayer is talking to God.** Whether we pray mid-catastrophe or in a joyful outburst, our God stands ready to hear us. God already knows everything about us. We do not have to use fancy words or hide how we truly feel.[5] We do not need to beg God to listen. His mighty arm is poised to help us when we cry out to Him. He will give us the wisdom we lack.[6]

Human words cannot fully capture the privilege God offers His children in prayer. God understands perfectly what we express imperfectly. Through prayer, we not only present our needs to God, but we also align our thinking to His. Like Jehoshaphat, we praise God for who He is. We thank Him for His many expressions of grace and mercy. We express the depths of our struggles and the heights of our joy. We confess His unshakeable promises as true and claim them by faith. We experience rich fellowship with God.

Our open access to God was costly. **Jesus died to break the barrier between sinful people and holy God.** Because of His sacrifice, believers can enjoy unhindered access to God's throne room.[7] We can talk directly to God, who even helps us when we do not know what to pray.[8]

To fail to pray is to forget how much we need God and ignore the lifeline He has given us. Perhaps you feel you should not bother God with things you can figure out on your own. Maybe you do not pray unless you are caught in a desperate situation. We need God just as much on the days we feel strong as on the days we struggle and stumble. When we do not talk regularly to God, we miss the blessings of communion with God, our deepest human need.

When you believe that God cares, listens, and responds when you pray, God becomes a real part of your daily life. The challenges you face in this life offer an opportunity to draw near to God. You can cry out to God from the depths of your heart and know that He will work on your behalf. You can speak to God no matter what you are experiencing – physically, emotionally, or spiritually. How natural is prayer for you? When has answered prayer clearly pointed you to recognize God's grace and intervention in your life? In what way does praying help you understand God and long for Him? Talk to God when you wake up, throughout your day, and before you close your eyes in sleep. God is eager for you to talk to Him.

5: Honest prayer: Matthew 6:5-15; 7:7
6: Provided wisdom: Luke 11:9-13; James 1:5
7: Christ provided access to God: John 14:13-14; Romans 5:1-2; Hebrews 2:17; 4:16
8: Holy Spirit helps us pray: Romans 8:26

Lord set ambushes against their enemies. In the confusion, the armies destroyed each other. The army of Judah arrived to discover a battlefield filled with dead bodies. **God won the battle for His people.**

Judah gathered valuable plunder from the battle. **The army returned to Jerusalem joyfully, praising God with music and great rejoicing.** The surrounding kingdoms heard the story of the victory. Judah experienced a time of peace as God gave them rest.

Jehoshaphat's Legacy – 2 Chronicles 20:31–21:3

Jehoshaphat's Final Years – 20:31–21:3

A Favorable Summary – 20:31-34

Jehoshaphat led Judah well. He did what was right in God's eyes. Jehoshaphat launched a campaign against idolatry. Not all the people responded faithfully and not all remnants of idolatry were removed from Judah. **God's gracious evaluation of Jehoshaphat's reign was positive.** God chooses to work through flawed people who will never get their act together this side of heaven.

A Final Slip up – 20:35-37

The Bible honestly portrays human weakness, even in the people who were obedient and committed to God. Jehoshaphat was a good king, but not a perfect one. God responded to Jehoshaphat's unwise decisions with corrective words and consequences. However, God also extended grace to this very human king who failed in some key moments. In the end, God, not any human being, is the hero of the Bible.

Near the end of his reign, Jehoshaphat entered another unwise alliance. This time, he joined in a ship-building enterprise with Ahaziah, another of Israel's kings. Mistakes are remarkably easy to repeat. Perhaps this venture to build a fleet of trading ships seemed profitable and innocent enough.

The prophet Eliezer rebuked Jehoshaphat and promised that the Lord would destroy the ships. Just as God declared, the ships wrecked and were unable to set sail. As humans, we do not have enough wisdom to make wise plans and decisions. We need God's guidance. His sovereignty overrules people's plans. Proverbs 19:21 says, "Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails." God will wreck the ships we try to build if doing so upholds His greater plan.

A Successor – 21:1-3

All of Jehoshaphat's sons were given valuable gifts and fortified cities. His firstborn son, Jehoram, succeeded him as king. God honored His covenant, as David's dynasty continued. Many dynasties continued to rise and fall in the northern kingdom of Israel. **Jehoram did not lead Judah to follow the Lord, but God kept His commitment to the house of David through whom He would send His Son into the world.** Humans may fail God, but His purposes are never thwarted.

Life in this world delivers all kind of challenges. Circumstances change constantly and difficulties arise frequently. Jehoshaphat's finest moment occurred during a crisis and sets an example we can follow. Recognizing that God is the source of everything we truly need is where to start. **Seeking God is the only way to have true security.** Only God can satisfy our deepest needs.

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

While a succession of kings in the northern kingdom of Israel continued to pursue idolatry and turn from God, King Jehoshaphat led Judah well. He intentionally rooted out many of the strongholds of idol worship throughout the land. He commissioned officials to teach God's Law to the people and appointed judges to apply God's Law correctly. Military fortifications in key cities protected Judah against enemies. Jehoshaphat took responsible actions to strengthen the nation.

Jehoshaphat sought God wholeheartedly, even though he struggled with making unwise alliances with Israel. When a large army gathered nearby to attack Judah, his spiritual leadership shined. Jehoshaphat sought God in prayer. He called the people to pray and fast. They looked to God, not human strategy, as their source of deliverance. Jehoshaphat gathered the people and prayed publicly. He intentionally set his focus on God's strength rather than his formidable enemy. Judah's army marched into battle singing praises to God only to discover that God had already defeated their enemy. The words from Jehoshaphat's prayer ring true for us, every day and in every way: "We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you." Life presents repeated opportunities to either turn to God or rely on our own resources. **Admitting our need and turning to God is always the right response.** God responds to those who seek Him.

Apply It

Jehoshaphat wanted the people of Judah to know and understand God's Law and had a plan to make that happen. We need to intentionally make God's Word a regular part of our daily lives. **Individuals, families, and churches are called to take active steps to make sure God's Word is taught and understood.** We need a constant infusion of truth to steady us as we navigate this world. A regular rhythm of Bible study binds God's truth into our hearts and minds. Study of God's Word is not merely intellectual, but leads to transformation and action. How can you make the Bible's truths more than just facts and information? Life's challenges reveal what we believe and who we trust most. How can God and His Word become your source of strength and hope? What practical steps can you take to lead your family and others to know God's Word and seek Him as their source of strength?

When calamity hit Judah, Jehoshaphat united the people to humbly seek God in prayer. God's people should engage with Him regularly, not just when trouble comes. However, what should we do when life is hard? In today's world, crises of many colors constantly erupt all over the world, and Christians are caught in the crossfire. Moral decline, social unrest, political strife, and many other situations put

pressure on God's people individually and corporately. Sadly, believers struggle to unite and humbly seek God. The combative posture that engulfs the world threatens the Church as well. Social media and other platforms provide an easy way to attack anyone who does not agree with you. The enemy works hard to divide us. How will God's people impact a lost and dying world if we turn on one another instead of turning to Him? There is a better way. Believers today could learn a mighty lesson from the people of Judah who stood together in families, young and old, and as a people committed to God. **We will not reach the world for Christ by fighting with one another, but by uniting to seek God.** 2 Chronicles 7:14 says, "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land." How might God use you to purposefully bring His people together and to prioritize prayer?

God's prophet told the people of Judah that the battle they faced was not theirs to fight. God would bring the victory and He would receive the glory. How do you fight your battles? Human weapons such as fiery words, well-laid plans, and well-thought conclusions are in our arsenal. However, the weapons God gives us are quite different. He calls us to pray humbly, saturate ourselves in His Word, serve Him and others faithfully, and wait patiently for Him to guide us. Truth upholds us, and His Spirit directs us. There are times to wait and times to take action. **Only as we seek God in moment-by-moment dependence on Him can we understand His path for us.** Are you willing to wait when you want to fight? How are you encouraged to know that God is with you in your current battle? When you do not know what to do, fix your eyes steadfastly on God.

God calls us to seek Him, but He also pursues us. When the mostly faithful Jehoshaphat got off course, God's corrections steered him back on the right path. Do you see God's discipline as loving and redemptive? The fact that God loves you too much to let you stray brings such encouragement. The next time you lose a battle or your ships wreck, will you cry out, "Lord, show me Your way"? **God lovingly pursues His children for their good and His glory.** He is worthy of our wholehearted commitment and highest devotion.

All Scripture quotations in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ® NIV ®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Elijah and Elisha

2 Kings 2–3

Lesson Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 7 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. After pondering the notes, what did you learn about your source of security in life? What challenged you?

2. What lesson from the lecture about Jehoshaphat's life did God use in your life this week?

Second Day: Read 2 Kings 2:1-12.

Elijah ascended to heaven.

3. How would you describe Elisha's relationship with Elijah from this passage?

© BSF 2022 (This material may be downloaded from mybsf.org and used by BSF class members in connection with their personal BSF class studies. It may not be otherwise reproduced without BSF's written permission.)

4. What did Elisha ask of Elijah before he ascended to heaven? What do you think he meant?

5. Describe Elijah's departure. What impressions or questions does this scene raise for you?

6. a. What do you learn about God from His provision of Elijah and Elisha as prophets to Israel?

   b. How has God faithfully revealed His power and provision to you?

Third Day: Read 2 Kings 2:13-25.

God established Elisha as His prophet for Israel.

7. a. In what ways did God confirm Elisha as His representative and prophet?

   b. Why was this important?

8. a. What challenges stand out to you about the scene described in verses 23-25?

   b. What Scriptures or thoughts help you process the instant judgment in this passage? What brings you peace?

9. In a world with so many competing voices, how is it possible to discern if someone truly speaks for God? (See Matthew 7:16-23; 24:11, 24; Galatians 1:6-9; 2 Timothy 3:14-17.)

Fourth Day: Read 2 Kings 3:1-19.

Elisha prophesied to King Joram and the Israelites regarding their battle with the Moabites.

10. Describe the character and influence of Israel's King Joram.

11. a. What situation led to conflict with the Moabites? What kings and kingdoms participated?

    b. How did Judah's king Jehoshaphat again find himself vulnerable to peer pressure and compromise? (See 1 Kings 22.)

    c. What problem did they face in battle?

    d. How was Elisha involved?

12. What practical lessons can you learn from these verses?

Fifth Day: Read 2 Kings 3:20-27.

God miraculously provided water, and Israel defeated the Moabites.

13. Tell how God's intervention met real needs and delivered the promised victory.

14. Why did the Moabite king sacrifice his son, and why did this inspire great wrath against Israel?

15. Israel and Judah fought with confidence based on God's promised deliverance. What promises of God offer you needed confidence today?

Sixth Day: Review 2 Kings 2–3.

God persistently extends grace to rebels.

16. How did these passages impact your thinking about the grace God has extended to you?

Passage Discovery (homiletics, word study, etc.) for Group and Administrative Leaders: 2 Kings 2–3

Lecture Notes

Next step: Read Lesson Notes.

Lesson Notes

2 Kings 2–3

Focus Verse

"When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, 'Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?' 'Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit,' Elisha replied." – 2 Kings 2:9

Outline

- Elisha Succeeded Elijah – 2 Kings 2
- Elisha Spoke for God – 2 Kings 3

Engage

We often evaluate the worthiness of an investment by the results produced. When we invest our money, we want to net an acceptable return. We prefer to spend our time in pursuits that prove personally profitable and valuable. God, however, does not think like we do. Does God only extend spiritual privileges to those He knows are receptive? God knows the absolute truth about every human heart and every nation. **Despite the fact that many people reject His grace, God continues to shine His light even among those who turn away from Him.** There is certainly a point at which God withdraws illumination from the steadfastly rebellious. However, God's mercy is infinitely wider and deeper than ours.

The people and kings within the northern kingdom of Israel continued to careen down a perilous path. They persisted in idolatry. God's unrelenting warnings and undeserved help were willfully ignored. The beginning, middle, and end of their story make us wonder if this kingdom was a profitable investment for God's mercy and kindness. However, God sent two powerhouse prophets to this proud and rebellious nation. Elijah and Elisha shined God's light into a rebellious kingdom that preferred darkness. **God persistently extends grace to rebels.** Human rejection of God's revelation does not silence His voice.

Elisha Succeeded Elijah – 2 Kings 2

This week's lesson again turns to the northern kingdom of Israel during the time Jehoshaphat reigned in Judah. Our spotlight first lands on the prophets God sent to speak into Israel's succession of kings and the turmoil in that kingdom.

We have already studied the powerful ministry of Elijah, God's prophet to Israel. Elijah represented God and demonstrated His power as he proclaimed the beginning and end of a severe drought.[1] He boldly confronted King Ahab and the prophets of Baal.[2] Elijah experienced God's restorative grace in a moment of extreme weariness.[3] **As God's man for the hour, Elijah diligently represented God's gracious call to a rebellious nation.** We pick up the story near the end of Elijah's tenure as God's primary prophet to Israel.

God raises up spiritual leaders in every generation. When one generation fades from the scene, God's next servant emerges. God called Elisha to follow Elijah, and Elisha immediately surrendered to God. Elisha burned his plows, sacrificed his oxen, and bid farewell to his parents.[4] He entered a God-ordained training program for as many as ten years. **Elisha learned from Elijah as he also came to know Elijah's powerful God.**

Though Elijah and Elisha have similar names, served the same God, and ministered to the same kingdom, they were unique individuals. Elijah was a fiery prophet who lived a solitary life and, broadly speaking, spoke words of judgment to rebellious Israel. Elisha's ministry was compassionate, gracious, and personal as he met the real needs of struggling people. God designs and assigns the right people with just the right gifts for specific situations. Though God's people share a common mission, His unique plans for individuals speak to His creative goodness. In the same way, God has woven together your personality, background, and circumstances to be used in a uniquely wonderful way.

God knows when to call His servants home. **As Elijah's departure neared, Elisha stood in the wings ready to carry God's message of truth to a land that loved lies.** Elisha's ministry would be different than Elijah's, but just as timely and equally powerful.

God Called Elijah Home – 2:1-12

The time had come for Elijah to rest from his labors and see God face-to-face. God spared His faithful prophet Elijah from experiencing death. Only two people in the Bible bypassed death and were taken directly to heaven.[5]

God promised Elijah He would not forsake Israel. He would preserve a faithful remnant.[6] Elisha represented part of the fulfillment of that promise. God did not abandon Israel to their hard-heartedness, but stayed with His people by giving Elijah a successor. **Even during this time of transition, God cared for His people with unrelenting grace.**

Preparation for a Transition – 2:1-10

A Farewell Journey – 2:1-7

Elijah made one final journey through Israel in preparation for his departure. He visited other prophets and tested Elisha's commitment. **The difficult calling of a prophet required unquestioning devotion to God.** Three times Elijah told Elisha to stay behind. Elisha remained close to his mentor as he swore,

---

1: Elijah and the drought: 1 Kings 17:1; 18:1, 41
2: Prophets of Baal defeated: 1 Kings 18:20-40
3: Elijah's restoration: 1 Kings 19
4: Elisha's call: 1 Kings 19:19-21
5: Bypassing death: Genesis 5:24; Hebrews 11:5
6: God's promised remnant: 1 Kings 19:18; 2 Chronicles 34:21; Romans 11:5

Company of the Prophets

The "company of the prophets" are mentioned with very little explanation of their role. These groups or schools of prophets appeared mostly throughout Elisha's ministry and deferred to his authority.[7] The Hebrew word used here for "company," often translated "sons," could refer to members of a guild, rather than biological sons. In that case, they were likely prophets-in-training who lived and studied together. **God faithfully maintained His presence among His people as He raised up the next generation of prophets to speak for Him.**

"As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you." **Elisha's unswerving commitment to Elijah demonstrated his wholehearted readiness to step forth as Elijah's successor.**

In each city, the "company of the prophets" asked Elisha about Elijah's soon-coming departure. The Lord seems to have revealed to them and to Elisha what was about to happen; Elisha consistently told them to keep the news quiet. **Elisha relied on God to direct Elijah's departure and his transition.** By doing so, Elisha teaches us a valuable lesson. He depended on God with an unwavering focus and waited on His timing.

Crossing the Jordan – 2:8

Elijah and Elisha's journey concluded in Jericho. Along with 50 of the prophets, Elijah and Elisha went to the bank of the Jordan River nearby. Elijah struck the water with his cloak, and **God parted the Jordan. Elijah and Elisha crossed over on dry ground.** This scene reminds us of God's parting of the Red Sea when the Israelites left Egypt and the parting of the Jordan when the Israelites entered God's promised land of Canaan.[8]

Elijah crossed the Jordan as he prepared to enter his heavenly home. **The abundant life and eternal victory that God promises His children offer perspective as we live in this world.**[9] This steadfast hope secures all who trust God's Son for their salvation.[10]

A Double Portion of God's Spirit – 2:9-10

Elisha boldly asked Elijah for an abundant blessing – "a double portion of your spirit" – as he prepared to step into his role. Elisha recognized God's Spirit at work in Elijah. Elisha was not asking for a literal double measure of God's/Elijah's spirit. Rather, Elisha asked to be considered as Elijah's firstborn son. Israelite law gave firstborn sons a place of honor and a double portion of their father's inheritance.[11] Elisha would assume Elijah's leadership role within Israel. His request indicated his commitment to this calling. Elijah responded by saying that if Elisha witnessed his ascension, he would indeed receive the double portion.

7: Elisha's authority: 2 Kings 4:1-7; 4:1-7, 38-41; 5:22; 6:1-7; 9:1-10
8: Waters parted: Exodus 14:21-22; Joshua 3:14-17
9: Eternal homeland: 2 Corinthians 5:1; Hebrews 11:8-16
10: Future inheritance: Romans 8:22-24; Colossians 3:24; 1 Peter 1:4
11: Firstborn birthrights: Genesis 25:19-34; Deuteronomy 21:17

Elijah's Ascension – 2:11-12

As Elijah and Elisha were walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire suddenly separated them. Elisha witnessed a whirlwind taking Elijah into heaven. God, who graciously provided for Elijah on earth, now miraculously took him into His presence. **Elijah experienced eternal glory that far surpassed the momentary troubles he faced serving God in an unrepentant nation.**[12]

Elisha tore his clothes in grief at the loss of his father figure; however, God granted Elisha's request and confirmed him as heir of Elijah's spirit of prophecy. **Through Elisha, God continued to relentlessly pursue His rebellious people.**

The transition from Elijah to Elisha foreshadows the more significant future transition from John the Baptist to Jesus. John the Baptist came in "the spirit of Elijah" and resembled him in dress and appearance.[13] Like Elijah, John the Baptist called for repentance. Elisha came after Elijah with a ministry of reconciliation and healing. This points toward Jesus, who came behind John the Baptist, healing and forgiving sins. This similarity is no coincidence. Centuries before Jesus was born, God was preparing His people for the coming of His Son.

God Confirmed Elisha as His Prophet – 2:13-25

God's Authority Upon Elisha – 2:13-15

A second parting of the Jordan River established Elisha as God's prophet and demonstrated His continued presence with His people. In a transfer of divine authority, Elisha took up Elijah's cloak and asked, "Where now is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" Elisha struck the water with Elijah's cloak and, once again, the waters parted. Elisha crossed the Jordan on dry ground. The watching company of prophets witnessed God's answer to Elisha's question. The spirit of Elijah now rested upon Elisha. God's Spirit and power had not changed. God's work would go on.

The Search for Elijah – 2:16-18

The fifty from the company of the prophets who had seen the whirlwind take Elijah away testified that God's Spirit now rested on Elisha. However, the shadow of Elijah loomed large. Had the whirlwind deposited Elijah in the nearby hills or valleys? They pressed Elisha to search the area but returned empty-handed. The unsuccessful search for Elijah further confirmed Elisha's succession and the authority bestowed upon him by God.

God's Power Through Elisha – 2:19-25

God continued to demonstrate His power in restoration and judgment. He spoke the same message through Elisha that He had through Elijah. God revealed Himself as Israel's God and called His people to turn back to Him.

12: Eternal glory: 2 Corinthians 4:17
13: John the Baptist and Elijah: Matthew 3:1-3; Mark 9:13; Luke 1:17

Healing – 2:19-22

Elisha's first act as Israel's prophet demonstrated God's persistent grace to a rebellious nation. Jericho's water supply was polluted, disrupting life and making the land unproductive. This suffering fulfilled a curse Joshua had pronounced on anyone who rebuilt the city God had destroyed.[14] Elisha threw a small amount of salt from a new bowl into the spring, which healed the waters and reversed the curse. God displayed His power of restoration and reconciliation by purifying Jericho's tainted spring.

Like the land around Jericho, rebellion against God polluted the whole nation of Israel. The hearts of the people were wells of evil instead of springs of holiness.[15] Through purifying the polluted waters, God demonstrated His power to redeem those corrupted by sin and heal their barren hearts.

God holds people accountable for how they react to Him, whether they recognize it or not. God determines the timing of His certain judgment that will establish righteousness and deal with wickedness.

Cursing – 2:23-25

God also displayed His grace to Israel through warnings against their persistent rebellion. Elisha traveled from Jericho to Bethel, a stronghold of idolatry in Israel.[16] Some boys from the city mocked his baldness and told him "Get out of here, baldy!" Whether they were ridiculing Elijah's recent departure or Elisha's appearance, their scorn brought serious consequences. Elisha called down God's curse and 42 of them were mauled by two bears. This dramatic response underscored the seriousness of mocking and rejecting God's prophet and, ultimately, God Himself.

How did Elisha's human response to the jeering boys impact his reaction? Was he tempted by selfish pride or anger? The text does not elaborate on Elisha's motives. However, God alone determined the judgment that fell on the young men as He established Elisha as His representative. God holds people accountable for how they react to Him, whether they recognize it or not. God determines the timing of His certain judgment that will establish righteousness and deal with wickedness. **While Elisha's ministry was more compassionate than Elijah's, God still judged those who rejected Him.**

Elisha Spoke for God – 2 Kings 3

The King's Alliance – 3:1-10

Joram's Evil – 2 Kings 3:1-3

Joram (also called Jehoram), the son of Ahab and Jezebel, became king after Ahaziah. **Israel's rebellion persisted under King Joram.** He perpetuated the idolatry of Israel's first king, Jeroboam, and "... did evil in the eyes of the LORD...." The one good thing Joram did was to tear down his father's pillar to the false god Baal.

14: Joshua cursed Jericho: Joshua 6:26; 1 Kings 16:34
15: Israel's sin: 2 Kings 2:19; 3:1-3
16: Bethel and idolatry: 1 Kings 12:28-33

God's Undeserved Favor

The Doctrine of Grace

God does not love us because of what we can offer Him. In fact, He loves us even though we do not naturally love Him back. **When we speak of God as gracious, we acknowledge that He continuously showers undeserved favor and blessings to people who have not earned anything.** We are no more worthy of God's lavish grace than the persistently rebellious Israelites. Every human being is so flawed by sin that we, by nature, do not seek God.[17] Despite the beauty of the created world and all of God's provisions, we prefer our way to His. We are takers, but God is a giver. Though we cannot earn God's favor, He offers us His best anyway. The Father sent His own Son to offer sinners a way to recover what sin had destroyed. Extending grace is what God does – naturally, persistently, generously, and personally.

The salvation believers experience exalts only Christ. Jesus redeemed us because of His great love and at great cost. He died to give us what we could not achieve on our own. Jesus extends grace, and we merely receive it. We can never earn what He gives us. The sweetness of fellowship with God, the power to live unchained from sin's prison, and the promises of eternity are all ours only because God is gracious. **Jesus' sacrifice offers the supreme expression of God's grace – He gave Himself for us.**

How important it is to understand God's inherent desire to extend grace and our desperate need for His grace. If we fail to see God as gracious, we can wrongly think of Him as a tyrant who lords His power over us. We can feel entitled and mistakenly believe we deserve God's favor by default. We misunderstand how God designed us to live, and we lack the humility that comes from rightly appreciating who He is. Without God's grace as the covering for our sin, we have no option but to wrongly think we can earn God's favor by performing better than others. **Without God's grace, we are in big trouble.**

God is more gracious than we can imagine. He has held back nothing, not even His own Son, to win us back to Himself. He gives us blessings we cannot fathom and certainly do not deserve. Though we do not present as a good investment, He has made us His children. **God's grace flows perpetually into our lives from His inexhaustible supply.** God, who is by nature a giver, gives and gives and gives some more. To say His grace is amazing does not seem strong enough to capture the full meaning of the word. What words could adequately explain the way God loves us? John 1:16 says, "Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given." Praise be to the God of all grace!

17: No one seeks God: Romans 3:9-18

Joram Marched Against Moab – 2 Kings 3:4-9a

Moab was a nation in the land of Canaan and, therefore, subservient to Israel. (Israel conquered Canaan: Joshua 1–12) Moab's economy revolved around herding sheep. Israel required payment of a tax of 100,000 lambs and the wool of 100,000 rams from Moab. **King Mesha of Moab rebelled against Israel and refused to pay the tax when Joram became king.**

Joram allied with King Jehoshaphat of Judah and the king of Edom to reconquer Moab. Jehoshaphat once again unwisely joined the king of Israel in a battle that was not his to fight.[18] Like his father, Ahab, before him, Joram failed to inquire of God before making his decisions.

Joram Faced a Crisis – 2 Kings 3:9b-10

Joram's lack of foresight resulted in a crisis on the march to Moab. With the alliance established, Joram marched his company to Moab by way of the wilderness of Edom. He took them on a circuitous route that left his army and their animals without water.

Joram blamed God for his situation – "Has the LORD called us three kings together only to deliver us into the hands of Moab?" Sometimes we think God is out to get us when our circumstances become difficult. Even if we have not sought God's counsel in the first place, we can be quick to blame Him when life becomes tough. Instead of taking responsibility for our failures and humbly asking God for help, we often grumble. **God sometimes allows times of great need so He can display His great power, grace, and provision.**

The Prophet's Answer – 3:11-19

Jehoshaphat encouraged Joram to seek the Lord in his time of need. "Is there no prophet of the LORD here, through whom we may inquire of the LORD?" When someone mentioned Elisha, Jehoshaphat affirmed that he was a true prophet of God. The three kings approached Elisha who at first refused, suggesting Joram should seek his own prophets. Elisha finally relented only for the sake of Jehoshaphat, knowing that God favored Jehoshaphat as David's faithful descendant. God's blessings sometimes spill over onto the rebellious because of one righteous person.[19]

God gave Elisha opportunities to speak for Him and influence the kingdom of Israel. Elisha prophesied that God would provide water for Joram's army and deliver Moab in battle. Elisha made it clear he only helped Joram in order to preserve Jehoshaphat.

The Lord's Action – 3:20-27

God was faithful to the word He spoke through Elisha. Without rain or storm, God miraculously filled the dry streambeds and pools so the animals and allied armies could drink. God enabled Israel to overpower the Moabites. Following the battle, the Israelites left the Moabite land uninhabitable. In a final desperate act, likely an offering to his false god, Moab's king sacrificed his firstborn son on the city wall. This terrible act and the destruction of their land caused the Moabites to hate the Israelites even more. The Israelites withdrew from battle and returned home.

18: Jehoshaphat joined Israel: 1 Kings 22
19: God's mercy because of one: Genesis 18:22-33

God again demonstrated His power and faithfulness to His people, despite their unfaithfulness. He saved the allied armies and gave them victory over the Moabites. Jehoshaphat experienced God's mercy when he again joined an unwise alliance and entered a battle he should have avoided. God allowed His prophet Elisha to declare His power to intervene on behalf of His people. The undeserved rescue Joram experienced in battle offered another rebellious king and the Israelites yet another opportunity to repent of their idolatry. This chapter in Israel's story spotlights God's heart toward sinners. **God persistently extends grace to rebels.** To persist in hardness of heart is to fail to acknowledge God's goodness and gracious opportunities to turn to Him.

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

God sent Elijah to forcefully speak into the spiritually dire situation in Israel. Elijah's countercultural and courageous voice for God clearly resounded above the noise of the rebellious fray. He was incredibly human and yet historically powerful for God. Elijah served faithfully throughout the slice of history into which God assigned him. While we might judge the return on Elijah's investment as fairly minimal in terms of people turning from sin and to God, God counted him faithful. In this period of deep unfaithfulness in Israel, God preserved a faithful remnant of which Elijah and Elisha stand as most important figures. The experienced servant Elijah invested in Elisha, his comrade and faithful learner.[20] God's voice continued to resonate, even in a land that mostly ignored His compassionate and gracious call. Elisha tenaciously followed Elijah and persistently stood for God's cause.

When God took His faithful servant Elijah into His presence, the mantle of privilege, hardship, and responsibility fell to Elisha. Emerging from Elijah's shadow with God-given authority uniquely suited to him, Elisha stepped up. And as he did, God validated His servant with precisely measured doses of divine power to meet the demands of the day. Elisha's ministry began as he met needs, demonstrated warnings, and offered guidance. Full of mercy and grace, Almighty God continued to reach out to His rebellious people. His voice is not silenced by unbelief. A remnant remained, even when outnumbered by the unfaithful. God's servants changed, but His message of hope remained consistent.

Apply It

God mobilizes His servants to carry out His sovereign plan. **God uniquely positions every Christian in specific roles and circles of influence by His design.** God calls us to trust Him as our seasons of life and circumstances change. Sometimes God calls us to *step up* and take on work He has prepared for us. Sometimes He calls us to *step back* and invest in the next generation coming behind us. Other times, He calls us to *step out* and hand the torch to someone else to carry. Your unique gifts, personality, and placement in God's kingdom are by His design. God wants to use you to take His message to your world. What unique role has God assigned to you? Service for God can be boldly

---

20: Invest in the faithful: 2 Timothy 2:2

visible or quietly obedient. Will you trust Him with where you live, who you know, and what He is asking you to do for Him?

The work to which God calls us is bigger than we are. Elisha stepped into a big role as he succeeded Elijah and experienced God's provision in amazing ways. As we seek to serve God and others, we quickly exhaust our natural intellect, wisdom, and human resources. God intentionally leads us into situations that require moment-by-moment dependence on Him. Over and over, we must trust Him for everything that His call requires. **Our confidence in serving God never rests in ourselves, but always in His sufficiency and who we are in Christ.** What God demands of us, He provides for us. What situation in your life exposes how much you need God's help? How quickly do you turn to God when He reveals your limitations and personal weaknesses? In what ways will you trust God's faithful provision as He calls you to step out in faith and obedience?

God's light cannot be extinguished. Israel certainly faced dark times as idolatry and sin escalated. King after king trampled on God's righteous standards. However, God sent Elijah and Elisha into that dark world as beacons of light. The rising darkness in our world can also discourage us. Most people today do not look to God and His Word to learn what is true and right. Instead, mere mortals who live but a few short years arrogantly declare their limited insight as superior to that of the Eternal Creator and Righteous Judge of humanity. Where has God placed you as a beacon of light?

Governments constantly change and evil people seem to exercise broad power and influence. We must remember that human history remains firmly steadied by God's sovereign control. Darkness will not prevail, even when evil appears to have the upper hand. A faithful remnant remains. **God continues to push back the darkness with the light of the gospel.** 2 Corinthians 4:6 says, "For God, who said, 'let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ." Will you step into the light and experience God's Person, power, and presence? God is still writing His story. He is the victor – never a victim.

All Scripture quotations in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ® NIV ®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Elisha's Miracles

2 Kings 4:1–6:7

Lesson Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 8 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the lecture help you recognize God's care and activity in your life this week?

2. What specific thought in the notes helped you worship God for His unrelenting grace?

Second Day: Read 2 Kings 4:1-7.

Through Elisha, God miraculously provided for a desperate widow.

3. a. Describe the situation this woman faced.

Her husband died, she now was a widow, taking care of her two sons. She was broke, she had nothing but a small bottle of olive oil. Her two sons were about to be taken, as slaves, by their debt-owner.

b. What hard questions might this desperate circumstance have raised in her mind?

What am I going to do ? Why did God allow for all of this to happen to me ? I am now a widow, left alone to take care of my two sons, I am broke, I'm going to be separated from my sons and they are going to have a life of suffering. Is this a punishment ? Does God care for me and my sons ?

© BSF 2022 (This material may be downloaded from mybsf.org and used by BSF class members in connection with their personal BSF class studies. It may not be otherwise reproduced without BSF's written permission.)

c. How did God meet the need of this distraught mother?

He made Elisha make a miracle for her and her sons :
Elisha gave her instructions to borrow as many jars as they could, pour out the olive oil into them, sell all the olive oil and use that money both for a living for them and to pay back the debt.

4. a. What lessons can you learn about God's provision from this passage?

God is able to, even make a miracle, in order to provide when He has decided to provide for you. He is able to provide even when circumstances are disastrous and desperate.

b. When has God stretched your faith by meeting a deep need in your life?

He always allowed us to have food, even when we didn't have any clue as to how we were going to find money to buy food.
He provided for an amazing husband, blessed me spiritually by enabling me to grow so much in my knowledge of Him through my husband, He continues to bless me day by day through enabling me to see my husband, who really is a tremendous reminder to me of

Third Day: Read 2 Kings 4:8-37.

Elisha enjoyed friendship and experienced God's power with a family in Shunem.

5. How did the Shunammite woman show hospitality and contentment in this passage?

She just made it her pure joy to serve Elisha and Gehazi, through :
- inviting them for a meal whenever they was in their town ;
- building a room on the flat roof of their house just for them.

6. a. In what ways did this family experience both unexpected joy and unprecedented challenge?

The first unexpected joy was receiving the gift of a son from God.
The unprecedented challenge was the great mourning / sadness as well as the decision of "what to do" as that son died.

b. How did Elisha respond to the crisis in this family that was dear to him?

He himself came to the house to see the dead body, even though he first intended just to send his servant Gehazi ;
He himself cured and resurrected the dead body.

7. What are some reasons that God does not always answer our prayers like He did for Elisha? Include any Scriptures that come to mind.

He is sovereign. His will must be done not ours. His ultimate goal is not to give us all we ask of him, or to give us the joy of having exactly what we ask of Him always, but rather, in those circumstances when He doesn't give us what we want, help us and get us to be content in Him, submit to his will, accept that his will alone be done, honour and glorify Him that way.

Fourth Day: Read 2 Kings 4:38-44.

Through Elisha, God miraculously met the practical needs of real people.

8. Describe the needs that Elisha encountered in these verses.

- The need for food, as there was almost nothing to eat in Gilgal because the crops had failed ;
- The need for the stew that was prepared to be made better.

9. a. Why might God have shown His power through Elisha in the way He did?

For all to have both a revelation or a reminder of God's power and glory;
For all to have a sign with which God proves Elisha is his prophet.

b. What needs do you face that feel either too impossible or too insignificant to bring to God?

I think I ought to admit that I don't pray enough and not persistantly enough for me to become a mom that is much more available for my children. Is it lack of faith ? (défaitiste) Do I lack the desire for that to change soon and urgently ? Have I come to accept this situation ? Do I have more selfishness that real concern for my children's well-being ? To what extinct do I truly want what's best for my children ? To what extinct am I truly devoted to my children ?

10. How does Elisha's example of compassionate care for others encourage or challenge you?

I could just try to excuse myself saying I don't have the gift of hospitality, or joke saying that but actually, I need to make a lot of efforts towards becoming hospitable, not even letting the fact of having many small children be an excuse. Elisha searched to provide for others and meet others' everyday needs. Regardless of whether and when my husband and I have the financial means for that, do I honestly have a real heart and a real concern for

Fifth Day: Read 2 Kings 5:1–6:7.

By God's power, Naaman was healed from leprosy, and a lost axhead was recovered.

11. Describe Naaman's position and situation.

Naaman was rich and highly esteemed in his country. He was also famous and was a very important personality as he was the commander of the Syrian army. He and his troops were always victorious with God's help, the King of Syria is said to have had a juge respect for him for that.

12. a. What did the servant girl suggest, and how did Naaman respond?

"If your husband Naaman would go to the prophet in Samaria, he would be cured of his leprosy".
He told that to the King, in order to ask that the King may enable him to do so.

b. Why did Naaman initially resist Elisha's instructions for his healing? What changed his mind?

Because first, he was shocked Elisha didn't bother to meet or see or greet him in person.
Second, because the way Elisha proceeded was so different from how he expected Elisha to proceed; he already had this picture of how things should go and what Elisha should have done.
Third, he says Elisha could have chosen a river that was nearer to Naaman.
Elisha's servant changed his mind.

c. How has pride kept you from doing the right thing?

Asking for forgiveness to my husband; asking for money to my boss.

13. How did God accomplish a deeper work in Naaman's life through this experience?

From that moment on, Naaman knew and believed God is the only true God.
From that moment on, he didn't sacrifice to any other god but God alone.
(Maybe he was saved, the Bible doesn't give clear and precise information on this).

14. Why did God reveal Himself to people outside of Israel?

Because it was always his plan to do so (other example : the prostituted who helped save the lives of Israel's spies). (Why then did He choose a Nation first, instead of revealing Himself to every nation from the very start ? Maybe this knowledge isn't allowed to God's children while they are alive).

15. Why might Gehazi have received such a harsh punishment?

For all to take a lesson from this as well;
For all to know sin always has a consequence as God is just.

16. What stands out to you in the story of the lost and recovered axhead?

Elisha cared about that prophet being ashamed towards the owner to whom he borrowed the axe.

Sixth Day: Review 2 Kings 4:1–6:7.

God's compassion moves Him to help suffering people.

17. What is the most surprising or challenging thing you discovered this week?

The woman from Shunem was so hospitable.
Elisha was moved by the sight of people's practical needs and met them.

Passage Discovery (homiletics, word study, etc.) for Group and Administrative Leaders: 2 Kings 4:1–6:7

Lecture Notes

Next step: Read Lesson Notes.

Lesson Notes

2 Kings 4:1–6:7

Focus Verse

"Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel." – 2 Kings 5:15b

Outline

- Miracles of Compassion – 2 Kings 4
- Miracles of Restoration – 2 Kings 5:1–6:7

Engage

What do you think God is like? While we may have our own ideas about God, the Bible reveals the truth about His character. We learn that God is so mighty that He created the world by merely speaking.[1] God's unlimited power would overwhelm us if that were the only thing that was true about Him. There is so much more. God is also infinitely compassionate.[2] Exodus 34:6-7 describes God: "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin." **God delights to care and provide for needy people.** God sent His own Son into the world to die for sinners as the ultimate demonstration of His compassion.

God expressed His tender care for rebellious Israel by sending His prophets to offer guidance and warnings. Unmistakable demonstrations of God's sovereign power invited people to turn to Him.[3] Elisha's ministry helps us understand even more about God as He expressed His power through timely miracles that met individual, practical needs. **God's compassion moves Him to help suffering people.** We know that God has not yet ended all suffering in this world. One day, God will bring an end to the reign of sin and its destruction. Now, He often uses suffering to soften our hearts to seek Him and draw us to Himself. We live in a world where suffering abounds. God calls us to reflect His heart of compassion for people in spiritual and physical need.

Miracles of Compassion – 2 Kings 4

Both Elijah and Elisha performed miracles that revealed God's power during a time of rising evil within Israel. These supernatural demonstrations of God's sovereign control authenticated Elijah and Elisha as God's representatives. **Ultimately, God revealed His power to prove that He alone is God and to**

1: God's power at creation: Genesis 1; Psalm 8:1, 3-4; Isaiah 40:26; John 1:3; Hebrews 11:3
2: God's compassion: Psalms 86:15; 103:13; 147:3; Isaiah 49:13; Matthew 9:36; 2 Peter 3:9
3: God's power on display: 1 Kings 18:36-39; 22:23; 2 Kings 1:10-12

turn people's hearts back to Him. Most of Elijah's miracles publicly confronted evil and condemned God's enemies. Elisha's miracles expressed personal compassion and alleviated suffering.

Elisha lived close to ordinary men, women, and families who followed the Lord. We most often find Elisha helping people, whether on a battlefield or facing challenges of daily life. Like his mentor Elijah, Elisha continued to interact with the company of the prophets, men who dedicated their lives to God.[4] Elisha traveled frequently throughout Israel, and his ministry touched both Israelites and Gentiles. **Personal relationships played an important role in Elisha's ministry.**

The Replenished Oil – 4:1-7

One of the men from the company of the prophets died, leaving his family destitute. Like people today who are left with medical or household bills when a family member dies, his widow found herself in a desperate situation. **The woman appealed to Elisha, saying that her creditors would soon enslave her sons as payment for their debt.** Mosaic law permitted temporary servitude for cases like this.[5] This catastrophic situation greatly grieved this mother.

Why does God allow brutally hard situations in the lives of His faithful servants? Unexpected suffering can cause us to question God's loving care. When we know that God controls all things, we can struggle to understand why God allows such pain. **We cannot fully explain God's reasons for our suffering, but we can trust Him.** Life on earth promises hardship that tests the reality of our faith. God often uses earthly trials in this fallen world to tenderize our hearts and help us focus on what matters most. We experience God's compassionate care in meaningful ways through hard times.

God often sends His help through His people. Elisha stepped into this woman's pain, asking a question that was warm with compassion, "How can I help you?" The only thing the widow could claim as valuable in her home was a small jar of olive oil. **The prophet sent the woman to her neighbors to ask for every vessel they could spare – not just a few.** The expectation for God's provision grew with each empty vessel gathered.

At Elisha's direction, the widow and her sons began to fill the gathered vessels with oil from her own small jar. Oil flowed abundantly, as it had with the widow in Zarephath who hosted Elijah.[6] She kept pouring until every jar was full; only then did the oil stop flowing. Elisha told her to sell the oil and pay her debts, and then she would have enough left to support her family. **The woman and her sons experienced God's faithfulness in an amazingly personal way.** God often sustains His children quietly and powerfully in the details of everyday life.

The Restored Son – 4:8-37

The Woman and Her Son – 4:8-17

Elisha developed a friendship with a wealthy family in Shunem and regularly stopped at their home when he traveled. This woman recognized that Elisha was a "holy man of God." **With kindness and sensitivity to Elisha's needs, this woman and her husband constructed and furnished a small**

4: Company of the prophets: 2 Kings 2:3, 15
5: Mosaic law: Exodus 21:2
6: Oil for Elijah: 1 Kings 17:16

room on the roof of their house for Elisha. This unnamed woman offers an example of proactive, gracious hospitality for God's people today.

Elisha asked the woman how he could repay her kindness. The woman expressed her contentment; she needed no favors and did not desire prominence. **Elisha's servant Gehazi pointed out that the woman and her husband were old but had no son.**

Childlessness brought a special kind of grief. In ancient culture, bearing children was associated with God's blessing. Children brought significance and security to a family. Bearing children connected to the perpetuation of the family name, the inheritance of land, and association with God's covenant promises to Abraham.[7] Many biblical accounts include God blessing despite barrenness.[8] Many couples today also experience the same profound desire for children yet grieve the inability to conceive. No one has greater compassion than God for this particular pain.

Elisha mirrored God's heart by displaying great care and concern for this woman and sought a way to extend God's love to her. **Elisha promised the woman that she would hold her own son in her arms within a year.** Though she was initially cautious to believe such a promise, she indeed became pregnant and gave birth to a son, just as Elisha promised.

The Distress and Deliverance – 4:18-37

Elisha's friends watched their son grow, likely with a constant awareness that he was a gift from God. Perhaps we are surprised that the wonderful people faced tragedy despite God's amazing gift. A severe headache seized the boy as he joined his father in the harvest fields. **Within a few hours, the boy lay lifeless in his mother's arms.** She carried the body of her beloved son up to Elisha's room and laid him on his bed.

Why does God not protect His people from such pain? Why would God give such a gift only to take this beloved son from his faithful parents? Job, who lost all of his children in one day, spoke hard truth as he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised" (Job 1:21). We would certainly rather have the Lord give than take away. **Our faith in God does not prevent us from encountering trouble but does equip us to trust Him in the midst of it.**

The mother immediately prepared to travel in haste to meet Elisha at Mount Carmel. She did not even share the painful reason for her trip with her husband. Her determination suggests that she was preparing for her son's resuscitation rather than his burial. She had lost her child but not her faith.

Elisha saw his friend approaching in the distance and sent his servant Gehazi to greet her. The woman indicated everything was fine when Gehazi communicated Elisha's concern. **Then she fell at Elisha's feet and poured out anguished words and hard questions.** Had God raised her hopes only to bring such profound disappointment? God is not surprised, nor does He turn away from us when we express our real struggles and deep pain. He knows what we are thinking and feeling at every moment. Honesty with Him prepares us for His transforming work.

Upon hearing the news, Elisha sent Gehazi on a nonstop journey to Shunem with instructions to lay his staff across the boy's face. When the boy did not revive, Gehazi reported the news to Elisha,

---

7: Abrahamic covenant: Genesis 12:6-7; 15:1-20
8: Barrenness: Genesis 21:1-7; 25:21-26; 29:31-35; 30:1-3, 17-21; 1 Samuel 1:5-20; Luke 1:13-14

who was on the way there himself. Elisha entered his quarters to find the dead boy on his couch. **The detailed record of his passionate prayer attests to his great love for this family and his deep faith in God.** As he prayed, the boy's body began to warm. A simple statement records this astounding miracle, "The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes."

This mother again held her precious son with an acute awareness of God's power, grace, and compassion. God, the giver of life, restored the life of her son as her grief turned to joy. Because he lived in a fallen world and an earthly body, this child would again die. But his renewed life offers a glimpse of the future – the permanent resurrection awaiting all believers. Jesus rose from the grave and defeated death. Those who put their faith in Christ anticipate a future day when death no longer steals away people we love.[9]

The Needed Provisions – 4:38-44

The Purified Stew – 4:38-41

Elisha returned to the company of the prophets in Gilgal during a time of famine. He instructed his servant to prepare a large pot of stew for God's servants. Someone gathered a large quantity of gourds for the stew that were not recognized as poisonous. Food was scarce, and resources were limited. **The men realized the danger of the toxic stew as they again found themselves without needed food.**

Elisha added flour to the stew, which became edible and nourishing. The cleansing power was not in the flour but rather in God's ability to heal and restore. Through Elisha, God reversed a bad situation and provided for His people.

God's presence and power are not reserved for only spectacular miracles. He provides for us through multiplied daily expressions of His tender care and sustaining grace, often through other believers.

The Multiplied Bread – 4:42-44

God cares about the practical needs of people, and we should as well. An unnamed man blessed God's people by bringing Elisha the firstfruits of his harvest – 20 loaves of barley bread and fresh grain.[10] Elisha's servant recognized that the bread was insufficient to feed 100 men. **Trusting God and His power, Elisha prophesied that not only would all eat, but there would also be leftovers.**

Perhaps you noted the similarity of this miracle to Jesus' feeding of multitudes.[11] God's abundant provisions accomplish more than merely meeting our basic needs. **In providing for us, God demonstrates His care and intimate knowledge of our needs.** God proves that He is near to us and involved in our daily lives. God's presence and power are not reserved for only spectacular miracles. He provides for us through multiplied daily expressions of His tender care and sustaining grace, often through other believers.

9: Victory over death: 1 Corinthians 15:54-57; Ephesians 2:4-9
10: Firstfruits: Exodus 23:19; Numbers 18:13; Deuteronomy 18:4-5
11: Jesus feeds multitudes: Matthew 14:16-21; 15:32-37; John 6:11-13

Basking in the Beauty of God

The Doctrine of God the Father

Elisha's miracles put God's power and compassion on vibrant display. Real people experienced tangible proof that God cared about their needs and intervened to help. God created us to know Him. Though sin distorts our ideas about God and our relationship with Him, He seeks to make Himself known to us. Our Heavenly Father reveals Himself through creation, His Word, His Son, His Spirit, and His people.[12] **God wants us to know and worship Him in spirit and truth – aligning our thoughts with what is true about Him.**[13]

Human thoughts and words cannot fully capture the wonders of God – all that He is and all that He does. Elisha's ministry clearly demonstrates God's tender concern and active intervention on behalf of His people. As we study Scripture and walk with God, our understanding and experience of the vastness of God's character grows. Our grasp of His love, holiness, mercy, power, transcendence, and many other attributes becomes real and personal. **There is much about God we cannot fully comprehend, but what He has revealed is more than enough to draw us to worship and surrender.**

Many people do not see God as real or involved in their lives at all. **To fail to recognize God for who He really is can only create a substitute reality that ignores or rejects truth.**[14] If life on earth happens apart from the loving and purposeful plan of God, where can security be found? If God exists but remains distant and uninvolved in this world and your life, what kind of God would He be? Because God really is who He says He is, we fool ourselves to think we can define Him on our terms or in a way that accommodates our choices.

Understanding God, even imperfectly, allows us to build our lives on an unshakable foundation. The humbling realization of the gap between God's perfection and our imperfection should drive us to the Father and His Son as the source of rescue and refuge. Our Father God meets our deepest needs – in Him we are fully known and fully loved. **The only true security in life comes when we surrender to God our Father and walk with Him.** As you set your gaze on God, everything you learn and experience about Him on earth will only be magnified for all eternity. We see God and His ways dimly now, but one day His unveiled face will be the theme of our eternal song and the focus of our highest destiny.[15]

12: God 's revelation of His character: Psalm 19:1-4; Ecclesiastes 3:11; John 1:14, 18; 5:39; 14:9; Acts 17:24-28; Romans 1:19-20; Hebrews 1:1-3
13: Knowing God in truth: John 4:24
14: Denial of God: Romans 1:21
15: Dimly now, clearly later: 1 Corinthians 13:12; 2 Corinthians 3:15-18

Miracles of Restoration – 2 Kings 5:1–6:7

The Healing of Naaman – 5

Naaman's Hope – 5:1-6

Naaman was a highly regarded commander of the army of Aram (present-day Syria), who had earned the favor of his king. The Arameans appear frequently in Israel's story as an enemy nation.[16] In this account, God puts a name and a face on an individual within a people we would otherwise regard as a faceless enemy. **God's grace to this suffering soldier reveals the boundless scope of His grace and salvation.** God is compassionate and merciful to people from all tribes and nations.

Despite his successful career, Naaman suffered with leprosy, a serious skin disease with devasting physical and social results. An Israelite servant girl served Naaman's wife. This girl lived as an exile – separated from her family and homeland. However, her thoughts toward Naaman were kind and generous. **This servant girl recognized God's power to heal and suggested that Naaman seek healing from "the prophet who is in Samaria" – Elisha himself!** Naaman listened to his wife and her servant girl and sought the king's permission to go to Israel. The king sent Naaman on his way with a letter addressed to Israel's king requesting his healing. Naaman took a staggering amount of money and 10 sets of clothing with him as a gift.

Naaman's Health – 5:7-19

When Israel's king read Naaman's letter, he was immediately suspicious of a Gentile from an enemy nation. The king tore his robes and declared that he was not God and did not have the power to heal leprosy. Elisha heard of the situation and requested that Naaman come to him. **With clarity and faith, Elisha told Naaman to dip in the Jordan seven times, and he would be healed.**

Naaman resisted and was offended by God's simple plan for his cleansing. Elisha's humbling solution did not match Naaman's preconceived expectations of how he might be cured. **Stunned and indignant, Naaman rejected this strange but simple solution to his deadly condition and left angry.**

Naaman's servants challenged him. For a second time, this man of high status was led by those deemed beneath him, and so he listened to his servants. They asked if he would resist if Elisha had asked something great of him. Why would he not dip in the Jordan and be cleansed? Naaman listened to these wise words, dipped in the Jordan, and his skin was restored. **Naaman experienced something even more wonderful than his healing – he recognized Israel's God as the only true God.** God drew Naaman to Himself while he lived in a culture steeped in idolatry. Elisha declined the gift Naaman offered to express his gratitude. He sent Naaman home with "shalom" – God's peace to guide him with his new understanding of God and His life-giving power. God transformed not only his diseased skin but also his heart. God always intended that His saving grace would reach all nations.

16: Aramean enemies: 2 Samuel 10:13-19; 1 Kings 20, 22; 2 Kings 6:8-23

Naaman's Wealth – 5:20-27

Elisha's servant Gehazi witnessed Naaman's wealth and sought to profit from his gratitude, even though Elijah had refused to do so. Gehazi caught up to Naaman and offered a deceptive but convincing story. He falsely claimed Elisha had sent him to ask for money and two sets of clothing. Grateful Naaman doubled Gehazi's request and sent him away with two servants to help carry the goods.

Elisha met Gehazi with probing questions upon his return. Gehazi lied to his master, but Elisha discerned the truth. He rebuked Gehazi's selfish desire to gain from God's blessings. **In judgment, Gehazi was sent away and struck with leprosy, the very disease from which Naaman had been miraculously healed.**

Elisha's pronouncement of judgment on Gehazi stands in stark contrast against the miracles of compassion, provision, and healing he performed. God knew the truth about Gehazi's heart, not just his actions. Certainly, this act of judgment offered Gehazi the opportunity to repent. **God's power can be used either for us or against us.** God, in infinite wisdom, perfectly dispenses blessing and judgment. While we cannot fully fathom all that God is and does, His ways are always right. God exercises justice and mercy in perfect balance.

God, in infinite wisdom, perfectly dispenses blessing and judgment. While we cannot fully fathom all that God is and does, His ways are always right. God exercises justice and mercy in perfect balance.

The Recovered Axhead – 6:1-7

Elisha continued to interface with the company of the prophets, groups of men who trained in the ways of the Lord. **When one of the groups outgrew their meeting space, they decided to build a bigger place to meet.** They went to the Jordan River to gather poles for the task. They invited Elisha who willingly joined them and their work.

As they began to chop down trees for lumber, one of them dropped the head of an ax into the river. This man cried out in distress to Elisha and explained that the lost axhead was borrowed. **Elisha asked where it had fallen and threw a stick into the river; the lost axhead floated to the surface.** God's power was demonstrated as this piece of heavy metal defied gravity and the flow of the river. His compassion was demonstrated for a man who did not want to lose a borrowed tool. God's servants experienced His concern for sudden, small disasters in everyday life.

This "miracle of the mundane" shows God's constant and merciful care over His people in their daily tasks. The work of God's people is significant to Him, and He watches over them as they do it. God involves Himself in their lives. God does what He does to show us who He is. God's acts reveal His character. **God's compassion moves Him to help suffering people.**

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Elisha emerged as a powerful man of God. He developed rich relationships as he traveled throughout the land. Elisha's ministry was not limited to mighty words and showy demonstrations before large crowds. He multiplied a destitute widow's oil to save her sons from slavery. He brought life to the dead son of a faithful friend. A poisonous pot of stew was made edible for hungry prophets. He multiplied a meager offering of bread so 100 men could eat. Elisha helped a proud but sick man find healing and know the one true God. When someone accidently lost something valuable that he had borrowed, Elisha called on God's power to meet the need of the moment. **Elisha mirrored God's compassionate heart and revealed His mighty arm to the people he served.**

Elisha's miracles generously and graciously exhibited God's power in the midst of a nation that had mostly turned their back on God. However, the people who sought God were not lost to Him. God sent a powerful prophet to remind His people that He saw their needs and cared for them. God's power is available to those who trust in Him.

Apply It

Compassion marked Elisha's ministry and miracles. God displayed His might, but not in a showy or public way. The needs of real people moved Elisha to action and activated God's power. Why is it important to understand that God is not only powerful, but also compassionate? As broken people, we stand in constant need of God's tender care. **Knowing that God sees, understands, cares, and acts to meet our needs provides deep comfort.** God does not turn away from our neediness and brokenness. He longs to heal, comfort, and restore. In what ways have you experienced God's compassion and personal care?

God's people are equipped to reflect His compassion to others. How do you respond when someone is caught in sin? In what ways are you oblivious to or detached from human suffering? We are surrounded by people with deep physical and spiritual needs. Like Elisha, God calls His people to share His heart and help hurting people. How has God positioned you to show His compassion to specific people? Has God gifted and given you an area of influence where you can care for individual needs?

Suffering and pain represent an unavoidable part of the human experience. Until the Lord comes to reign and rule, sickness, sin, and death remain a constant part of life's landscape. God is compassionate, but this does not mean that He never allows us to hurt or have a hard time. Our prayers for relief and rescue are not always answered as we desire. We watch people we love endure suffering. Removing pain is not the only way God demonstrates compassion. God often reveals His love through His comfort in the midst of unrelenting suffering. Situations that rob us of human solutions help us turn to God. Desperate times awaken our spiritual sensitivities to allow God's purifying work in us. If you are suffering with no relief in sight, how have you experienced God's compassion? **God is infinitely compassionate, whether or not our circumstances change.** The God who did not spare His own Son to meet mankind's greatest need will not forsake you.[17]

17: God's Son not spared: Romans 8:32

Elisha experienced a deep relationship with God and rich relationships with others. One day in heaven, we will join exuberant believers from every tribe, language, and nation.[18] Christians need each other as they walk with God in this world. Our podcasts and earbuds cannot adequately replace life-on-life Christian fellowship. Walking with God is not a solo sport, but a team sport. The way we encourage each other, irritate each other, and grow together is all a part of God's redemptive plan. Deep relationships enrich life immensely. God also intends that we move beyond our comfortable circles of like-minded believers. Do all of your friends look and think like you? How well do you know your neighbors? Can you pray for them by name? **To love God means we must also love people.** Impact for God's kingdom requires investing in others, not as projects, but out of a heart so loved by God that His love overflows to others.

18: God's unified people: Revelation 5:9; 7:9

All Scripture quotations in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ® NIV ®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

A Promise-Keeping God, Elisha, and Many Kings

2 Kings 6:8–14:29; 2 Chronicles 21–25

Lesson Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 9 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What did you learn in the notes that helped you better grasp God's compassion toward you?

2. How did the lecture help you personally apply lessons from Elisha's ministry?

Second Day: Read 2 Kings 6:8–8:6.

Elisha's merciful miracles displayed God's power.

3. a. How did God use Elisha to protect Israel and reveal His unseen power?

© BSF 2022 (This material may be downloaded from mybsf.org and used by BSF class members in connection with their personal BSF class studies. It may not be otherwise reproduced without BSF's written permission.)

b. Describe a time you underestimated God's sovereign power and control. What did you learn?

4. What was the situation in Samaria? How did the various people respond?

5. How is God's character displayed in these passages?

Third Day: Read 2 Kings 8:7–10:36; 2 Chronicles 21:1–22:9.

God fulfilled prophecy through a succession of kings in Judah and Israel.

6. List the kings covered in this passage and briefly describe what stands out about each king.

   Kings in Aram:

   Kings in Judah:

   Kings in Israel:

7. How did God faithfully fulfill the prophecies He made through Elijah (see 1 Kings 21:17-29)?

8. Was Jehu's vengeance honoring to God? Why or why not?

Fourth Day: Read 2 Kings 11; 2 Chronicles 22:10–23:21.

God protected Judah's King Joash.

9. Who was Athaliah, and what did she do?

10. a. How did God spare Joash to uphold His covenant promises to His people?

    b. What do you find interesting or challenging in 2 Chronicles 23?

11. How have you experienced God's faithfulness in a personal way this week?

Fifth Day: Read 2 Kings 12–14; 2 Chronicles 24–25.

Joash served well then regressed, and Elisha died.

12. a. Describe the influence of the priest Jehoiada on his nephew King Joash.

    b. What happened after Jehoiada died? What were the consequences (see 2 Kings 12:17-18; 2 Chronicles 24:17-27)?

13. How did Jehoahaz and Jehoash influence the kingdom of Israel?

14. Elisha finished strong as God's servant. What stands out to you about his ministry?

15. Write a prayer to God expressing your desire to live faithfully and asking for His power to do so.

Sixth Day: Review 2 Kings 6:8–14:29 and 2 Chronicles 21–25.

God preserves His purposes, His promises, and His people by His power.

16. How does God's faithfulness to His people give you hope for our world today?

Passage Discovery (homiletics, word study, etc.) for Group and Administrative Leaders: 2 Kings 6:8–14:29

Lecture Notes

Next step: Read Lesson Notes.

Lesson Notes

2 Kings 6:8–14:29; 2 Chronicles 21–25

Focus Verse

"And since the LORD had not said he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, he saved them...." – 2 Kings 14:27

Outline

- Powerful Mercy – 2 Kings 6:8–8:6
- Prophecy Fulfilled – 2 Kings 8:7–10:36; 2 Chronicles 21:1–22:9
- Promised Protection – 2 Kings 11–14; 2 Chronicles 22:10–25:28

Engage

Have you ever seen the surviving remains of a house battered by a massive tornado or typhoon? A sturdy chimney, stairwell, or part of the foundation sometimes stands amid the rubble as a reminder of what had been there. This week's passage feels a bit like a destructive storm that flung debris in every direction. We saw kings come and go, often through brutal attacks by power-hungry rivals. We are greatly helped if we take stock of what was sturdy enough to remain through the onslaught. **Many dynasties were blown down, but God preserved the royal house of David and the promised line of the Messiah in Judah.** His sovereign power upheld His unshakable promises.

God's preserving influence through Israel's story offers us hope. Life in our world can also feel like a furious storm. We see perpetual grappling for political and economic power. We find that our careers, relationships, and hobbies come up short as a source of peace and fulfillment. Even our personal lives offer a steady stream of change. What remains standing when everything else blows away? Only God and His Word stand firm no matter what. **God preserves His purposes, His promises, and His people by His power.** God is steady when our world is shaking. He can be trusted.

Powerful Mercy – 2 Kings 6:8–8:6

The Attacking Arameans – 6:8-23

Elisha's ministry within the kingdom of Israel continued. God did not withhold help when Israel again faced war with Aram. God enabled Elisha to repeatedly warn Israel's King Joram[1] of the enemy's battle plans. Aram's enraged king assumed a traitor existed within his ranks. His officers

1: Joram: 2 Kings 1:17

denied leaking information to the Israelites. They explained that Elisha told Israel's king the very words Aram's king spoke in his own bedroom. **Aram's furious king sent soldiers to capture Elisha at Dothan and surrounded the city.**

Elisha's servant informed Elisha of the encircling Aramean troops. Elisha calmed his panicked servant by telling him that God's forces outnumbered their foes. **Elisha prayed that his servant's eyes would be opened to see the angel army that protected them.** The horses and fiery chariots filling the hills became visible to Elisha's servant. While human vision naturally focuses on visible circumstances, God is always doing far more than we can see or understand.

After God opened his servant's eyes, Elisha boldly prayed that the eyes of the raiders be blinded. He led the sightless soldiers into the capital city of Samaria to stand before Israel's king. **Rather than killing the Arameans within enemy territory, Elisha advised that the king feed them and send them back home.** This act of mercy brought Israel temporary reprieve from Aramean raids.

The Siege of Samaria – 6:24–7:20

Severe Famine – 6:24-7:2

The Arameans brought trouble on Israel yet again. Aram's king, Ben-Hadad, laid siege on Israel's capital city of Samaria. **Food became incredibly scarce, and the Israelite people slowly starved.** Even undesirable food, such as a donkey's head and seedpods, cost more than people could pay. Desperation even led to cannibalism. A woman complained to the king that her friend convinced her to kill and eat her own child. Sick with grief and anger, the king tore his royal robes to reveal he was wearing sackcloth, the clothes of deep mourning. These terrible events fulfilled prophecy given by Moses regarding the devastating consequences that awaited those who rejected God.[2]

Israel's King Joram refused to accept personal responsibility for his nation's turmoil. **Instead, he turned his anger on God's representative and sought to behead Elisha**. As His faithful prophet faced yet another threat on his life, God revealed the intent of the king's messengers to Elisha before they arrived.

Elisha, so often an agent of God's mercy, spoke prophetically that the famine would end the very next day. God showed kindness to His rebellious people over and over again. The king's skeptical messenger scoffed at Elisha's prediction. Elisha promised the king's official that he would see God's promise fulfilled but not eat any of the abundant food himself.

The Arameans Flee – 7:3-20

Four desperately hungry lepers lived outside the city because of their disease. They decided to take their chances and see if the Aramean soldiers would show them mercy and offer food. To their astonishment, they found the Aramean army camp abandoned. **God caused the invading army to hear the roar of an approaching army and flee.**

The amazed lepers ate heartily and began to gather plunder from the camp. Then, stricken by concern for the suffering people, the lepers spread word of God's abundant provisions to the hungry citizens

---

2: Sin's consequences: Leviticus 26:27-29; Deuteronomy 28:49-57

of Samaria. **The people poured into the camp to gather food and claim the enemy's treasure.** The rushing crowd trampled the king's doubting messenger, as Elisha had prophesied. Every starving person who tasted food that day had an opportunity to recognize God's abundant grace. God vibrantly displayed His compassion and overcoming power!

The Shunammite Woman's Land Restored – 8:1-6

The events in this week's passages seem out of chronological order. This text speaks of famine, the subject of the previous chapter, and also of Gehazi, Elisha's servant who previously lied and was stricken with leprosy.[3] **Whatever the actual sequence of events, Elisha's ongoing ministry of compassion for people remains evident.**

Elisha still enjoyed friendship with the Shunammite woman whose son he had raised from the dead. This woman and her husband had provided living quarters for Elisha in their home.[4] **Elisha warned these friends that the Lord had decreed a seven-year famine, and they sought refuge in the land of the Philistines.**

After seven years, the family returned to discover the confiscation of their house and land. The woman went to the king's courtroom to appeal for the return of her property. At that very moment, Elisha's servant Gehazi was with the king recounting Elisha's miracles. In God's perfect timing, just as Gehazi was telling the king about Elisha restoring the life of the dead boy, the woman appeared. **The king restored everything that belonged to Elisha's friend – including the income from her land.** This seeming coincidence reveals God's compassionate care alongside His persistent appeals for Israel's kings to recognize His power and seek Him.

Prophecy Fulfilled – 2 Kings 8:7–10:36; 2 Chronicles 21:1–22:9

Political intrigue alongside the rise and fall of kings marked the history of Israel, Judah, and their enemy nations. This passage includes accounts of kings from both kingdoms as well as their frequent foe in battle, the nation of Aram (later known as Syria). **God's faithfulness to keep His promises rises above the list of kings and the records of their exploits.** What God said would happen came to pass. God delivered His promised judgment against those who opposed Him. God preserved the royal lineage of King David throughout the tumultuous story of Israel and Judah.

Elisha and the Kings of Aram – 2 Kings 8:7-15

Earlier, God had commissioned Elijah to anoint Hazael as king of Aram.[5] This duty fell to Elisha as Elijah's successor. Ben-Hadad, the current king of Aram, fell ill. **When the suffering king heard that Elisha was coming to Damascus, he sent his trusted aide Hazael to ask Elisha if he would recover.**

3: Gehazi: 2 Kings 5:26-27
4: Shunammite woman: 2 Kings 4:8-37
5: Hazael, king of Aram: 1 Kings 19:15

A Succession of Kings in Judah and Israel			
Judah	**Israel**	**Prophet**	**Neighboring King**
Jehoshaphat	Ahab	Elijah	Ben-Hadad (Aram)
	Ahaziah	Elisha	
Jehoram (Joram)	Joram (Jehoram)		Hazael (Aram)
Ahaziah	Jehu		
Athaliah → Joash	Jehoahaz		
Amaziah	Jehoash (Joash)	Elisha dies	

Elisha boldly delivered an ominous answer. Ben-Hadad would recover from his current illness, but he would indeed die. Elisha fixed a glaring stare on Hazael and then began to weep. Through his tears, Elisha predicted the devastating suffering Hazael would inflict upon Israel. Elisha also told Hazael that the Lord had revealed he would become king. **The day after Hazael reported Elisha's news to Ben-Hadad, Hazael smothered Ben-Hadad and usurped his throne.**

God had foreordained that Hazael would serve as king of Aram. Hazael's ascent to Aram's throne fulfilled God's promises but also brought excruciating suffering to God's people. As humans, we cannot comprehend the evil that God allows as He accomplishes His perfect plan. Later this year, we will study the writings of Habakkuk, who asked God some hard questions with which we also struggle.[6] **Even when we cannot fully understand God's ways, we can trust Him.** God judged the Israelites through the cruel brutality King Hazael inflicted upon them. The Israelites had perpetually spurned God's kindness and rejected Him as their God.

Jehoram and Ahaziah, Kings of Judah – 2 Kings 8:16-29; 2 Chronicles 21:1–22:9

King Jehoram of Judah – 2 Kings 8:16-24; 2 Chronicles 21:1-20

The spotlight now shifts to Judah and her kings. For a brief moment, we travel back in time to Elijah's ministry. Early in Joram's reign in Israel, Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram became king in Judah. The similarity of these names requires deliberate attention! Jehoshaphat's costly compromise of intermarriage with Ahab's family reaped terrible consequences. Athaliah was evil King Ahab's daughter and the wife of Judah's King Jehoram. The damage of this alliance unfolded early in Jehoram's reign. He murdered all his brothers to secure the throne. **Jehoram reversed his father Jehoshaphat's spiritual reforms and returned Judah to idol worship.** Despite Jehoram's unfaithfulness, God kept His promises. He did not destroy the house of David.

Military conflict characterized Jehoram's reign. In mercy, God appealed to Jehoram through a letter from the prophet Elijah. **Elijah foretold the suffering Jehoram and his people would endure because of his rebellion.** Jehoram died an excruciating death. These tragic words were recorded about him, "... His people made no funeral fire in his honor, as they had for his predecessors ... He passed away, to no one's regret..." (2 Chronicles 21:19-20).

6: Habakkuk's questions: Habakkuk 1:1-3, 13

King Ahaziah of Judah – 2 Kings 8:25-29; 2 Chronicles 22:1-9

Jehoram and Athaliah's son Ahaziah succeeded him and continued to lead Judah into wicked ways. Ahaziah allied with Israel's King Joram in a battle against Hazael of Aram. Wounded in battle, Joram retreated to Jezreel in Israel to recover, and King Ahaziah visited him there. It was in Jezreel that enemies seized the opportunity to kill Ahaziah and his relatives. Despite this violent attack, God's unstoppable plan to preserve David's dynasty would not be destroyed.[7]

Jehu, King of Israel – 2 Kings 9–10

Our camera angle shifts to the kingdom of Israel as we rewind a bit to pick up the developing storyline there. **Judah's King Ahaziah's visit to Israel sets the backdrop for Israel's next king to emerge in a bloody rebellion.**

Elisha secretly sent one of his student prophets to anoint Israel's next king, Jehu. In the privacy of a closed room, with the anointing oil streaming down his face, Jehu heard his commission. He was told that God had chosen him as Israel's king. He would destroy the house of Ahab and avenge the prophets killed by Ahab and Jezebel.

Jehu kept his anointing a secret and conspired against King Joram. He drove his chariot madly to Jezreel to meet Israel's King Joram and Judah's King Ahaziah. This meeting took place in the very field Ahab and Jezebel (King Joram's parents) had stolen from Naboth.[8] **In a zealous attempt to fulfill Elijah's prophecy and avenge Naboth's blood, Jehu shot King Joram with an arrow then pursued and killed King Ahaziah.** King Joram's dead body was thrown on the very plot of land seized from Naboth.

When Queen Jezebel heard of her son Joram's death, she adorned herself to meet Jehu, who ordered her death. **Jehu continued to relentlessly slaughter the remaining family of Ahab and Joram.** He also tricked the prophets and worshipers of Baal. He deceitfully joined them in worship but ordered them killed and their temple destroyed.

Elijah's prophecies came true.[9] However, Jehu's self-declared zeal and brutal atrocities repel us as we read them today. **Though Jehu served as God's instrument of judgment, his methods disregarded God's commands.** Jehu would be judged for his brutal rampage. All people are accountable to God. Hosea 1:4 says, "… I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel." God allowed Israel's continued decline during Jehu's reign. Jehu failed to remove the golden calves from Bethel and Dan and lost a portion of Israel's territory east of the Jordan.

7: David's royal lineage: Matthew 1:1-17
8: Naboth's field: 1 Kings 21
9: Elijah's prophecies: 1 Kings 21:20-29

Promised Protection – 2 Kings 11–14; 2 Chronicles 22:10–25:28

God Preserved David's Heir to Judah's Throne – 2 Kings 11–12; 2 Chronicles 22:10–24:27

Athaliah's Fury and Downfall – 2 Kings 11; 2 Chronicles 22:10–23:21

The Queen Mother Athaliah heard that her son Ahaziah was dead and began her own terrifying purge. She sought to murder Judah's royal family, including any children who could potentially inherit the throne. God raised up an unlikely heroine – Ahaziah's sister Jehosheba. Married to Jehoiada the priest, Jehosheba courageously rescued her helpless infant nephew, Joash, from his grandmother's fury. **Joash remained hidden in the Lord's temple for six years while the ruthless Athaliah ruled Judah.** In another battle of the cosmic war first declared in Genesis 3:15, Satan's seed tried again to destroy God's promised seed.

In the seventh year, Judah's military leaders, alongside the Levites and leaders from Judah's clans, secretly assembled in the Jerusalem temple. They agreed that David's heir, not Athaliah, would reign in Judah. **With King David's actual spears and shields stored in the temple, 7-year-old Joash was crowned king.**

The priest Jehoiada made a covenant with God, the king, and the people. Athaliah was slain and spiritual reforms began again in Judah. Altars dedicated to Baal were smashed. **Judah rejoiced as God again preserved David's family to rule in Jerusalem.**

Joash's Reforms and Regression – 2 Kings 12; 2 Chronicles 24

Joash followed the Lord while guided by the godly high priest Jehoiada. The Jerusalem temple, which had fallen into disrepair, was restored. The priest Jehoiada lived to be 130 years old and influenced King Joash and the people to again seek God.

Sadly, Joash's apparent faith faltered after losing Jehoiada. **Joash had been dramatically rescued and heroically mentored, yet his life ended in tragic rebellion against God.** He bribed an invading army with the temple treasures. Joash, without the guidance of his godly uncle-in-law, led his nation to revert to idol worship. He ignored the warnings of God's prophets. Joash's cousin Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, boldly spoke the Lord's rebuke against Joash and was cruelly murdered in the temple courtyard.

An Aramean invasion soon overran Judah. **Wounded in the battle, Joash was murdered in his bed by his own officials and shown no respect in his burial.** Many warnings can be drawn from the life of Joash. People who truly commit to God tune their hearts to follow Him. External influences and skin-deep compliance with God without a heart that seeks Him are not enough.

God Keeps His Promises

The Doctrine of Covenants

The Bible often refers to covenants – God's promises made to an individual or group. Some of God's covenants are conditional – depending upon the response of the people involved. Others are unconditional – resting solely on God's faithfulness. In the Mosaic Covenant, God conditionally promised to bless Israel when they obeyed His commands. God called His people to prosperous obedience and warned about the consequences of disobedience.[10] In the Abrahamic Covenant, God unconditionally promised a great nation and worldwide blessing that would come through Abraham's descendants – specifically the Lord Jesus Christ, who offers salvation from sin to all who believe in Him.[11]

This week's lesson highlights God's commitment to the Davidic Covenant – His promise to King David of an eternal throne and kingdom.[12] God's preservation of David's lineage through the murders and treachery within Judah speaks to the trustworthiness of His promises. The purity of David's line in Judah's monarchy culminated in the promised Savior to come. **God's faithfulness to keep His promises reflects the integrity of His character and His sovereignty over all things.**

To ignore or reject the value of God's covenant promises is costly. There is a plan, ordained by God and held firm by Him, to accomplish everything He intends in this world and for eternity. **Without the sure hope of God's faithfulness to what He has declared, world history and daily life feel random and uncertain.** The ancient promises God made to Abraham, Moses, and David have value for today.

God's covenants reveal His character. **God speaks truth, commands history, and communicates hope to the people of earth.** He tells us what He will do, and He does it without fail. He sent His Son to save us, as He promised. Rest assured that Jesus will come again and set up His kingdom and reign for eternity, as He has promised. Since God kept David's descendants on Judah's throne, He can be trusted with your life. What specific promise from God's Word gives you hope, peace, and stability today? Our promise-keeping God is worthy of your trust.

More Kings and More Distress – 2 Kings 13–14 ; 2 Chronicles 25

Jehoahaz and Jehoash, Kings of Israel – 2 Kings 13:1-13

The parade of kings with similar names and fates requires focused attention. Jehoahaz succeeded his violent father Jehu to reign in Israel for 17 years. Despite God-given reprieve from Aramean oppression, Jehoahaz did not lead the people to seek God. Jehoash succeeded his father, Jehoahaz, and reigned 16 years in Israel. He also did evil in God's sight and went to war against Judah and King Amaziah. **The drumbeat of rebellion against God in Israel continued its somber cadence.**

10: Mosaic Covenant: Exodus 19–24; Deuteronomy 28
11: Abrahamic Covenant: Genesis 12:1-3
12: Davidic Covenant: 2 Samuel 7:12-16; Psalm 132; Isaiah 55:1-5

Elisha and God's Power Over Death – 2 Kings 13:14-25

Elisha became ill during the reign of Jehoash in Israel. Jehoash did not honor God, yet he showed respect to God's ailing prophet. Even though he was near death, Elisha offered Jehoash a sign predicting victory in a battle with the Arameans. Elisha died and was buried. A man's body that was thrown into Elisha's tomb touched his bones and miraculously sprang to life. **In life and death, God's power actively flowed through Elisha.**

Elisha ministered almost exclusively among a people who consistently rebelled against God and ignored His warnings. He faithfully served God and Israel through acts of compassion, powerful miracles, and devotion. Elisha's story offers rich encouragement as God's people today live among family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, and cultures that mostly ignore God. To serve despite rejection reflects Jesus' sacrificial death for sinners. Believers are called to follow Jesus' example and serve selflessly. **Day after day, relationship by relationship, Elisha listened to the Lord and did what He commanded.** Elisha's God has not changed. God's power has not diminished. His words are just as true and powerful now as they were for Elisha.

Amaziah, King of Judah – 2 Kings 14:1-22; 2 Chronicles 25

Joash's son Amaziah started well as Judah's king. He avenged his father's death and experienced victory in battle against Edom. **Defeated by compromise and pride, Amaziah did not remove idolatry from Judah.** He boldly challenged Jehoash, king of Israel, to a battle in which Judah was soundly defeated. Part of Jerusalem was destroyed. His life ended when he was killed by conspirators.

Jeroboam II, King of Israel – 2 Kings 14:23-29

A second evil king in Israel named Jeroboam reigned in Israel for 41 years. Despite his evil, God extended grace to the people of Israel in restoring some of their borders. "The LORD had seen how bitterly everyone in Israel, whether slave or free, was suffering; there was no one to help them. And since the LORD had not said he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam son of Jehoash." **God preserves His purposes, His promises, and His people by His power.**

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

The history of Judah and Israel resonates with God's faithfulness despite ongoing rebellion. Throughout their dramatic story, God powerfully revealed Himself in many ways across multiplied generations. God's prophets, like Elisha, continued to speak – warning the people of sin's dangers and reminding them of God's faithfulness. God brought unexpected and undeniable deliverance from staggering foes in battles and severe famine. God graciously and persistently offered a way of escape as He called the people to forsake their idols and turn to Him. While most people turned away from God, a faithful few recognized His power and believed His promises. God always preserves a remnant to encourage people to do the right thing.

Reading about the succession of kings and events in this lesson can be confusing or overwhelming. Imagine the people who lived through it! The familiar and certain crumbled with the intensifying ruin around them. Tangible security was repeatedly shaken with each coup and the succeeding king. What rises from the rubble of Israel's somewhat distressing history? **The only sure thing in Israel's story and our story is God Himself.** His plans will not be thwarted. God protected the royal lineage of the promised Messiah through the descendants of David and the kingdom of Judah. The solid truth that rises from Israel's wreckage speaks to people today. The only true security in life is found in God.

Apply It

God opened Elisha's servant's eyes to the unseen spiritual reality before him. Tangible and visible certainties often blind us to the invisible spiritual forces at work in our lives. Much of life involves spiritual battles of which we are often oblivious.[13] The enemy works in sneaky, underhanded ways. Distractions, doubts, and discouragements keep us from prayer. Deep thoughts about God are set aside. As our focus on God wanes, so does our desire to seek Him. We can feel defeated and outnumbered as we stand for God. Like Elisha's servant, we often fail to recognize that God's power is stronger than anything that opposes us.[14] The battle we face is not just for personal survival, but for the hearts and souls of real people. How might God awaken you to recognize the spiritual battles you face? **Fix your gaze on God, who is stronger than anything that opposes Him.**

What does it look like to find security in God while living in a world that keeps us reeling? How do we keep our thoughts stayed on God when governments change, society declines, and life tumbles? This world's mounting rubble should actually propel us Godward. We are in constant need of the stability only God can provide. Scriptural principles and God's unchanging promises give perspective to what otherwise seems only chaotic. The Holy Spirit trains believers to trust God with what they cannot control or change. We can base our lives on what God has declared to be true. By His sovereign power, God establishes rulers and controls the boundaries of every country and every individual life.[15] **God's steadfast purposes triumph over the storms of this life.** God is worthy of our trust and the only source of true peace. Isaiah 26:3 says, "You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you." How can you better experience the perfect peace God intends for you as you live in this battered and tumultuous world?

Elisha served God faithfully for the long haul. One day at a time, one conversation at a time, one decision at a time, Elisha leaned into God for power and wisdom that were not his own. Elisha did not have to be perfect because his God was perfect, powerful, and compassionate. **A life well-lived requires seemingly insignificant daily choices to deny self and trust God.** The direction of our steps determines our destination. God walks with us through monumental life intersections and ordinary daily routines. We must trust God for strength when He leads us to climb a rugged path. We thank Him when His wind propels us forward. He carries us forward when our strength fails. What direction are you walking? What small step in the right direction will you trust God to help you take today? How are you encouraged to know that God walks with you and leads you where He wants you to go? Walking steadily with God in this life prepares us to enjoy Him forever. We do not walk alone.

13: Spiritual battles: Ephesians 6:12
14: God's greater power: 1 John 4:4
15: God's sovereignty over history: Job 42:2; Proverbs 16:33; Acts 17:26; Romans 9:19-21; Colossians 1:16-17

All Scripture quotations in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ® NIV ®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

God Speaks: Old Testament Prophets and Prophecy

Amos 3:7; 2 Chronicles 36:15; Romans 15:4

Lesson Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 10 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the lecture help you process such a long list of kings? What was the single most important truth that impacted your thinking this week?

2. What did you learn from the notes that helps you fix your gaze on God and His purposes? How will you do that?

Note: This lesson provides background for our study of the prophets, which begins in Lesson 12.

© BSF 2022 (This material may be downloaded from mybsf.org and used by BSF class members in connection with their personal BSF class studies. It may not be otherwise reproduced without BSF's written permission.)

Second Day: Read Psalm 73:24; Isaiah 28:23; and John 10:27.

God actively reveals Himself and speaks into human history.

3. a. God speaks so that people may hear. In what ways does God communicate with people?

   Psalm 19:1-6; Romans 1:18-20

   Psalm 119:105; John 17:17

   Amos 3:7; 2 Peter 1:20-21

   Hebrews 1:1-2

   Isaiah 30:21; John 14:26

   b. Which verse was particularly meaningful to you? Why?

4. a. Why is it important to recognize God's active involvement throughout human history?

   b. How can you hear God's voice and discern His truth in a world with so many competing voices?

Third Day: Read Isaiah 65:1-2 and Ezekiel 20:4-7.

God jealously desired the purity of His people and relentlessly pursued their wholehearted devotion.

5. a. What had God uniquely promised His people, and how had He called them to live (see Exodus 19:3-8; Jeremiah 30:22; and Ezekiel 20:19-20)?

   b. From our study this year so far, how did the Israelites disregard God and their unique calling as a people?

6. a. How did God respond to His people when they strayed (see Deuteronomy 30:15-18; 2 Kings 17:6; 24:2; and 2 Chronicles 36:15)?

b. What do you learn about God's character from His dealings with His people?

7. a. Why is wholehearted devotion to God so important (see Psalm 86:11 and Ezekiel 11:19-20)?

b. What influences in your life distract you from wholehearted devotion to God?

Fourth Day: Read 2 Chronicles 7:14.

The Old Testament prophets called God's people to repent and live rightly as His people.

8. a. From your Bible's table of contents, list and count as many prophetic books as you can identify.

b. Can you think of any other prophets in the Bible who do not have books named after them?

9. a. Read Isaiah 6:1-10. What stands out to you in God's call to the prophet Isaiah?

b. Read Jeremiah 1:1-10. What stands out to you in God's call to the prophet Jeremiah?

10. God's prophets spoke His message into current situations, but also revealed truth about the coming Messiah and God's unfolding plan of redemption for the world (see 1 Peter 1:10-12). Why are both important?

Fifth Day: Read Romans 15:4.

The Old Testament prophets' writings speak with relevance for our lives today.

11. a. What challenges you as you think about studying the Old Testament prophets?

    b. How does Romans 15:4 encourage you?

12. Think about how Israel's history relates to the modern world and your life. In our study so far this year, what timeless truths have you seen:

    a. About people?

    b. About God?

13. How does God's faithfulness in the past give you hope for the future?

Sixth Day: Review Isaiah 65:2.

God's prophets mercifully called rebellious people to turn to Him.

14. What stands out to you as you think about God's intentionality in revealing Himself to the world?

No homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders

Lecture Notes

Next step: Read Lesson Notes.

Lesson Notes

Amos 3:7; 2 Chronicles 36:15; Romans 15:4

Focus Verse

"All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations." – Isaiah 65:2

Outline

- How Do the Prophets Fit Into the Old Testament? – Amos 3:7
- Why Did God Send Prophets? – 2 Chronicles 36:15
- What Difference Do the Prophets Make in Our World Today? – Romans 15:4

Engage

The God of eternity speaks in ways that He can be heard. Creation broadcasts God's creative power and unseen attributes.[1] The Bible captures eternal truth in human words we can read and hear.[2] In the fullness of time, God spoke through His own Son.[3] And now, the Holy Spirit awakens our minds to understand God's infinite truth.[4] **God does not speak merely to convey information; He speaks so we can find our highest purpose in Him.** God reveals Himself, calls us to faith, and leads us to walk through this life and toward eternity with Him as our steadfast anchor.

Ongoing rebellion left the people of Judah and Israel in constant turmoil. They rejected God and chose idols. They spurned God's righteous standards to set their own. However, God continued to speak through His prophets as His chosen people spiraled downward toward their eventual exile. God's constant plea for His people's hearts echoed within His warnings against their reckless sin. God's voice resonated through words spoken by His courageous representatives. **God's prophets mercifully called rebellious people to turn to Him.** The God of heaven does not sit idly by while people stroll toward destruction. He speaks.

How Do the Prophets Fit Into the Old Testament? – Amos 3:7

The Bible tells one grand and true story of God's plan to redeem sinful man through His Son. **The Old and New Testaments work together to convey God's plan for human history and eternity.** Everything that happens moves God's story toward the glorious consummation He has designed.

1: Creation's witness: Romans 1:18-20
2: The Bible's witness: Psalm 119:105; John 17:17
3: God spoke through His Son: Hebrews 1:1-4
4: Holy Spirit's witness: John 14:26; 1 Corinthians 2:8-10

Each book of the Bible expands our understanding of God and His ways. **Amos 3:7 says, "Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets."** God spoke through the prophets as He prepared for the day He would also speak through His Son.[5] Up to this point, we have studied the narrative of the kings. We turn now to study the Old Testament prophets as they fit within the developing Old Testament storyline.

The Old Testament Narrative

The Old Testament begins with creation and ends when a remnant of God's people returned from exile to rebuild their devastated homeland. God's plan to redeem humanity through His Son weaves around His chosen people, the nation of Israel. This year's study began as Israel divided into two kingdoms – Israel and Judah. Their persistent rebellion and collision course toward God's judgment, including their eventual exile, can be discouraging. The text can be difficult to read. Brief interludes of revival offer hope that is quickly dashed by the response of rebellious hearts.

This year's study ends with Israel exiled in Assyria and Judah captured by Babylon. After the exile, the solitary kingdom of Judah emerged to carry on God's promises of Messiah and redemption. God's relentless pursuit of His people remains evident even as they faced devastating judgment.

Of the 39 Old Testament books, only 13 directly advance the developing storyline.[a] The books of Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah contain the narrative of the Old Testament. The prophets add depth and perspective, revealing God's deeper work within and beyond the recorded events. Israel's story pictures the grander cosmic story of humanity.

The Old Testament Prophets

A prophet is an authorized spokesman for God. The Bible uses other terms such as "seer"[6] or "man of God"[7] to designate these messengers. Scriptures also warns about false prophets, who wrongly represent God or otherwise lead people astray.[8]

God did not speak a "new word" through His prophets. God had already communicated His expectations for His people at Mount Sinai through the Mosaic Covenant.[9] Israel would enjoy blessing as long as they obeyed this covenant. The curses of the covenant, intended to be more corrective than punitive, awaited them if they disobeyed. **When Israel rejected the truth they knew, God sent prophets to call them to return to a life more fruitful than the path the nation had chosen.** His prophets did not deliver a new message, but simply offered reminders of what God had already made clear.

God's prophets conveyed messages based on divine communication and spoke with God's authority. For example, God touched and filled Jeremiah's mouth with His own words.[10] God's prophets did not proclaim themselves as God's representatives, but were divinely appointed and

---

5: The prophets and Jesus: Luke 24:44; Acts 3:17-18; Hebrews 1:1-2
6: Seer: 1 Samuel 9:9; 2 Samuel 24:11; 2 Kings 17:13
7: Man of God: 1 Kings 13; 2 Kings 4:9
8: False prophets: Isaiah 44:24-25; Jeremiah 14:14; Matthew 7:15; 2 Peter 2:1
9: Mount Sinai: Exodus 19–24
10: Jeremiah's message: Jeremiah 1:9-10
a: David Talley, *The Story of the Old Testament* (Reclaimed Publishing: 2013).

anointed by the Holy Spirit.[11] They stood in the divine courtroom and rendered God's judgments.[12] The prophets courageously spoke to earthly kings with heavenly authority, often risking their own lives.

Most Old Testament books of prophecy, from Isaiah to Malachi, bear the names and contain the sermons of a particular prophet. The Old Testament narrative also contains the stories and oracles of many other prophets such as Elijah and Elisha. **God's prophets spoke difficult messages in troubling times.** The historical context surrounding each Old Testament prophet helps us understand their specific message. However, their timely messages prove amazingly relevant to Christians today. The prophets often revealed divine values that undergird a life that honors God.

Prophets, Priests, and Kings

God tasked Israel's kings to guide the nation to live in obedience to the Mosaic Covenant. The summary of a king's reign as "good" solely represented their faithfulness to this priority. Because the kings and the nation were prone to disobedience, the role of the priest was very important. The priest's primary responsibility was to restore fellowship between the Lord and the people through the offering of sacrifices. The Lord graciously provided a way for sins to be addressed so that the people could enjoy a restored relationship with God and experience His blessing.[13]

The kings disobeyed God much of the time. To make matters worse, the kings and the people did not seek reconciliation with the Lord through the priests. **The monarchial period would have been even more distressing if God had not mercifully sent prophets to call Israel's kings back to covenant fidelity.** The prophets were not always popular, but their role in the nation was invaluable.

Why Did God Send Prophets? – 2 Chronicles 36:15

Neither the facts about the prophets nor their writings can fully capture God's deeply merciful purposes in sending them. The dark and discouraging period in Israel's history recorded in 1 Kings 12 through Nehemiah 13 provides the backdrop for God's prophets. **2 Chronicles 36:15 expresses well the parallel realities of the people's rebellion and God's relentless pursuit of their hearts: "The Lord, the God of their ancestors, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place."**

The Prophets Expressed God's Persistent Love for His People

The juxtaposition of human sin against God's righteousness offers a much-needed perspective on our own hearts and the world in which we live. Both the ancient and modern world reveal humankind's constant rebellion against God, the Creator, and His amazing grace. Society recklessly indulges in sin. Even believers continue to battle against personal and corporate sin. By God's grace, sin's stranglehold only tells part of the story. **Throughout history, God has persistently and compassionately reached from His own sphere of holy perfection into our broken world in tangible ways.**

11: Prophets appointed by God: Numbers 11:29; 2 Kings 2:9-15; Isaiah 6:1-10; Jeremiah 1:9-10; Ezekiel 2:1-8
12: Divine courtroom: 1 Kings 22:19-23; Jeremiah 23:16-18; Micah 6:2
13: Sacrifices for sin: Hebrews 10:11-12

Gaining a Grip on the Old Testament Prophets

Prophetic books comprise the last 17 books of the Old Testament.

These books are grouped into two broad categories. The MAJOR Prophets are longer and historically grouped separately, although they are not more important. The shorter MINOR Prophets (also known as "The Twelve") were preserved on a single scroll for fear of being lost.

- There are five books by **MAJOR Prophets** – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel
- There are twelve **MINOR Prophets** – Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi

Understanding where each prophet fits in the Old Testament timeline is also helpful. Some prophets spoke prior to the exile of Judah and Israel, some during the exile, and some after the exile. (This study includes prophetic books in the approximate order the prophets entered Israel's storyline. The exact timing of some of the prophets remains debated by scholars.)

- **Pre-Exile:** Obadiah, Joel, Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Jeremiah
- **Exile:** Lamentations (written by Jeremiah), Daniel, Ezekiel
- **Post-Exile:** Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

Additionally, some prophets spoke to the kingdom of Judah, some to the kingdom of Israel, and some to foreign nations.

- **To Judah:** Joel, Micah, Isaiah, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, Daniel, Ezekiel, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi
- **To Israel:** Amos, Hosea
- **To Foreign Nations:** Obadiah (primarily Edom), Jonah (Assyria), Nahum (primarily Assyria)

God sent individual prophets to stand before specific kings to speak customized warnings and guidance. **Even when inevitable judgment loomed over people who persisted in sin, God's mercy stands tall.** Similarly, when Jesus pronounced the woes of judgment against the leaders of Israel in Matthew 23, He lamented the rebellion of the people He came to redeem. God's Son longed to gather His people like a hen gathers her chicks under her wing. [14] Human parents tenaciously pursue the well-being of their children. In a much greater way, the biblical prophets reveal the Father's heart to protect and redeem His children.

From our vantage point centuries later, we know the Israelites persisted in sin. We study these prophets with full knowledge that God's people failed to repent when God showed them grace. **For the most part, Israel rejected the prophets God sent to them.**[15] There is good news – God's plan of redemption succeeded in spite of Israel's failures. Israel demonstrated humanity's need for a Savior

---

14: Jesus' compassion: Matthew 23:37-39
15: Prophets rejected: Nehemiah 9:26, 30; Jeremiah 7:25-26; 25:4; 35:15; 44:4-5; Daniel 9:6, 10; Zechariah 1:4; 7:11-12; Acts 7:37-39

whom God planned to provide all along. God sent His own Son into the world to bear sin that was not His own. Jesus was killed by the people He came to save. **Israel's rebellion could not stop God's redemptive plan.** The door of grace is always open for those who walk through it.

The Prophets Explained God's Higher Purposes

The Prophets Spoke Into Their Current Situation

God's prophets spoke directly about the current events in the times in which they lived. They addressed specific threats faced by the people who heard their message. They called out particular ways the people had turned from God and rejected His covenant. Some prophets even personally embodied the message God sent them to proclaim – for example, Hosea took an adulterous wife to picture Israel's unfaithfulness towards God and God's unconditional love for His people.[16] Their declarations often included an announcement of coming judgment with hope that the people would repent of their wicked ways. **While we often think of prophecy as relating to the future, each prophet's primary message confronted a current issue.** First and foremost, the prophet's communication focused on the contemporary circumstances and the people's disobedience to the covenant.

The Prophets Spoke Beyond Their Current Situation

In a beautiful reflection of the sovereign purposes of God, the prophets' proclamations carried an application beyond the contemporary time period. The prophets *looked back* in Israel's history to remind them of the life they had been called to enter through God's covenant at Mount Sinai. The prophets also *looked forward* in human history to the Messiah who would fully accomplish God's redemptive plan. **The targeted rebukes and warnings of God's prophets incorporated both the immediate and distant future in an often mysterious way.** They foretold Israel's coming captivity and future restoration. Some prophets also declared the impending judgment of foreign nations. These messages comforted Israel who suffered much at the hands of these foreign nations.

Beyond emerging historical events, the prophets heralded Christ and His coming kingdom. **The shadowy truth about the coming Messiah gained gradual clarity.** The first and second coming of Christ often appeared intertwined in Old Testament prophecy. When Jesus actually came, people expected Him to conquer and reign rather than suffer and die. Jesus fulfilled every prophecy concerning His first coming. He will fulfill even more prophecies upon His return. Old Testament prophecy anticipates the day evil's dominion in the world ends, and God establishes His eternal kingdom.

The telescoping layers within biblical prophecy point to Jesus and all He brings for God's people. Jesus came to earth to pay sin's penalty. He will return to claim His people and establish His kingdom. **The entire Bible points to Jesus – all He is, all He has done, and all He will do.**

16: Prophets' embodiment of God's message: Jeremiah 13:1-11; 16:1-4; 18:1-12; 19; 27–28; 32:6-44; 43:8-10; Hosea 1:1-3; Jonah 1:17; Matthew 12:38-41

The Living and Active Work of God's Spirit

The Doctrine of The Holy Spirit

God's Spirit actively enabled the Old Testament prophets to speak for Him. **2 Peter 1:21 explains, "For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."** In mysterious beauty, the one God exists in three distinct persons – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Old Testament reveals the Father's gracious pursuit of His people, promises the coming Son, and records the Holy Spirit's work through the prophets and God's people.

The Holy Spirit remains active today. When Jesus is exalted and people come to saving faith in Christ, God's Spirit is at work.[17] The Holy Spirit regenerates and permanently indwells every believer. The Spirit gives new life and joyful communion with God.[18] The Holy Spirit fills believers with spiritual power to overcome sin and share the gospel.[19] He gives them the sense of being God's child and intercedes for them.[20] Unfortunately, believers can also quench the Holy Spirit by resisting Him.[21] Spiritual truth is understood by the spiritually receptive through the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit.[22]

Just like Israel needed the Holy Spirit to actively speak through the prophets, we need the Holy Spirit in our daily lives. People are not able to seek God nor turn to Christ without the Holy Spirit's transforming influence.[23] Unless God's Spirit brings the words of the Bible to life, God's truth cannot be understood and applied.[24] **To fail to respond to the Holy Spirit is to dismiss God's loving invitation to know Him personally.** Oh, how we need the Holy Spirit!

God has provided everything His people need to spiritually flourish in this life.[25] Through the Holy Spirit's power, the believer can stop relying on human strength to fight personal sin. Confidence to share the gospel grows when you realize that only the Holy Spirit, not human eloquence, can reach a human heart. You will read God's Word expectantly when you know that the Holy Spirit unlocks the treasures of Scripture for you. As the Holy Spirit instructs your mind and guides your prayers, you learn to listen for His promptings. God did not save us and then leave us to figure out how to walk with Him on our own. God put His own Spirit within His children. The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead lives within every believer.[26] How can you better appreciate and surrender to the Holy Spirit's work within you?

17: The Holy Spirit and salvation: John 15:26; 16:14
18: The indwelling Holy Spirit: Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 6:19; 12:13; Ephesians 1:13-14
19: The filling of the Holy Spirit: Ephesians 5:18
20: Spirit's intercession: Romans 8:26-27
21: Quenching the Spirit: 1 Thessalonians 5:19
22: The Spirit of truth: John 16:13
23: No one seeks God: Romans 3:10-18
24: God's Word made alive: 1 Corinthians 2:9-16; Hebrews 4:12
25: Abundant life: John 10:10; Ephesians 1:3
26: Same Spirit: Romans 8:11

The prophets pointed to…	The prophets called for…
God's MERCY	The RESPONSE of His people
God's HOLINESS	The HOLINESS of His people
God's SOVEREIGNTY	The SUBMISSION of His people
God's GLORY	The WORSHIP of His people

What Difference Do the Prophets Make in Our World Today? – Romans 15:4

What can you learn from these ancient spokesmen? There is no doubt – studying the Old Testament prophets can seem daunting. Romans 15:4 tells why this study is worth the effort: "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope." **God uses every word in His Word for our benefit.**

We Learn Truth About God

God revealed Himself through Israel's history and the messages of His prophets. **Across the ages, God provides the only steady foundation in a constantly changing world.** The passages we will study do far more than recount history – they teach us truth we need to know about God.

God displayed His holiness as He upheld His covenant standards. As a result, He righteously judged His people's sin. With unconditional and unrelenting love, God repeatedly called for the Israelites to repent – to turn and live rightly as His people. God's sovereignty and divine power not only overturned enemies but set the course of history. The fulfillment of prophecy reminds us that God is real. He always speaks the truth. **These truths about God have deep personal implications for our faith.** The prophets help us understand what makes for or prevents a fruitful life. Fix your eyes on God as you learn about Him from these passages.

We Learn Truth About People

God is still God. People are still people. Like the Israelites, people today profess that they know more than God about how to live and what is right. The way of the world appears more convenient and pleasurable than obeying God. When God's people wander from His ways, His loving discipline still reaches them. The prophets offer a real picture of the costliness of sin as well as the immensity of God's kindness to call people to repentance.[27] **Israel's story and God's intervention through His prophets teach timeless truths about humanity.**

We Recognize Amazing Relevance to Our World Today

God has greater purposes in prophecy than satisfying our curiosity about the future. What God has revealed in the past and about the future impacts how we live today. **The lessons taught by the**

27: God's kindness in repentance: Romans 2:4

prophets offer guiding principles alongside foundational truths that spare us pain and offer us hope. The societal ills God confronted in Israel, Judah, and other nations remain present in our world today. We still struggle to discern God's voice of truth among the deafening noise of other voices. Like Israel, when we walk in disobedience, God faithfully calls us back to Himself. His Word is proclaimed in our places of worship, and the Holy Spirit actively works in our lives. The message in these ancient books remains amazingly relevant.

The prophet's warnings resonate with our world, but so do the accompanying messages of hope. **A timeless clarion call rises from Israel's story and God's prophets: God is the God of the universe; repent and turn to Him, and He will save you and give what you need to lead an authentic life.** The unknown future rests in God's mighty hands. God's plan to redeem His people and put an end to the reign of evil in this world remains unwaveringly certain. We need this truth to navigate life and prepare for eternity.

The spiritual gift of prophecy is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:27–14:40, but we do not have a clear New Testament example of how that gift should function. **Most biblical prophecy was a contemporary call to truth that God had already revealed.** The major avenue for prophecy today is the teaching of God's Word to offer "... teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). God does not hold back what we need to know. Our greatest need is not more revelation, but the Holy Spirit's power to apply what God has already revealed.

God's prophets mercifully called rebellious people to turn to Him. Nothing has changed. God's arm remains tenderly outstretched to rebellious people today.[28] He continues to call us to find rest in Him.[29] This world promises what it cannot deliver. Only God gives true life.

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

The Bible's narrative books tell God's true story; His prophets amplify that story. God created the world, called a people to Himself, and diligently led them in His ways. God entrusted Abraham's descendants with His law and covenant promises. God passionately pursued His rebellious people when they turned from Him to seek other gods. **God sent His prophets to speak His message with His authority as He called His people to turn back to Him.** These divine messengers spoke both into and beyond the current turmoil of their day.

The last 17 books of the Old Testament contain the writings of prophets God sent to Judah, Israel, and foreign nations. Each prophet delivered a message that addressed a current situation. Within these writings, God disclosed truth about the coming Messiah and His unfolding plan for world history. The prophetic writings are not always entirely clear to us, nor were they fully understood in the day they were delivered.[30] God intends us to learn more than just information from the words He spoke through His representatives. **The Old Testament prophets offer a vibrant picture of God's heart and personal call to obedient faith.**

28: God's outstretched arm: Isaiah 65:2
29: Rest: Matthew 11:28-30
30: Prophets' understanding: 1 Peter 1:10-12

Apply It

Every part of God's Word has value for our lives. Familiar passages of Scripture provide comfortable refuge. The Psalms teach us to praise and worship God. Books such as Romans strengthen our grip on essential doctrines. The New Testament epistles help us understand life as a believer. Apart from a few passages, the Old Testament prophets are less known and appreciated. God has afforded you the privilege of studying these often-overlooked books with a group of people on the same journey. Will you trust Him to expand your thinking in ways you do not expect? God and His faithfulness will shine through. The ungodly kings and their disappointing stories create a longing for someone and something better. By His grace, God provided the better King, His own Son, who came to rescue humanity from sin's destruction. The whole Bible points to Jesus. We stand ready to view God's magnificent redemptive plan from a fresh perspective. Are you ready?

God did not remain silent while His people strayed. Then and today, He seeks to be known and understood. God's prophets spoke into the chaos when His people rejected the protective boundaries He intended for their good. The prophets challenge us to an introspective look at our blind spots and what we value. The Holy Spirit opens our minds to understand the Bible and spiritual truth. God places us in community with other believers so we can help each other walk with God consistently. When we stray, the Holy Spirit reveals our sin and leads us to repentance. God is not distant or removed from you. **The God of heaven actively works among the people on earth.**[31] God will pursue you and fight for your good. His love for you is persistent and consistent. In what ways have you experienced God's protective or corrective care this very week? Where has He shined His light on the blind spots in your life?

God has positioned and prepared you to speak for Him in specific ways. He has deliberately placed you in a particular family, workplace, neighborhood, and nation. Perhaps you find yourself surrounded by people who reject God. Whether you have lots of relationships or live a fairly isolated life, God has designed work for you. Even if your words about the Lord mostly fall on deaf ears, your faithfulness to God matters. God has assigned you to a zone of influence. Whoever you are and wherever you live, Jesus' return is closer to you than to those who have gone before. You have experienced God's comfort and faithfulness in unique ways. What personal testimony about God and His persistent love can you share with others? Who needs to hear your story?

31: God at work: John 5:17

All Scripture quotations in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ® NIV ®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Jonah, the Reluctant Prophet

Jonah

Lesson Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 11 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What did you learn from the lecture about God's work through His prophets that impacts your life today?

2. What did you learn about God and His ways from the notes? How does this truth speak into your life this week?

Second Day: Read Jonah 1.

Jonah ran from God's call to Nineveh, and God sent a big fish to swallow him.

3. a. What does 2 Kings 14:25 reveal about Jonah?

© BSF 2022 (This material may be downloaded from mybsf.org and used by BSF class members in connection with their personal BSF class studies. It may not be otherwise reproduced without BSF's written permission.)

b. How did Jonah respond to God's call to go to Nineveh?

c. Why might Jonah have responded as he did?

d. Give reasons and ways that people run from the Lord today.

4. What do you learn about God from this passage?

5. Nineveh was known for extreme cruelty and evil. How might you struggle to think about God extending mercy to people or groups of people known for outrageous wickedness today?

6. Has God ever asked you to do something you did not want to do? How did you respond, and what did you learn?

Third Day: Read Jonah 2 and Matthew 12:39-41.

Jonah prayed from the belly of the fish and experienced God's deliverance.

7. a. What does Jonah's prayer reveal about God?

b. What phrases in Jonah's prayer stand out to you? Why?

8. a. Why are desperate circumstances so often used by God to teach us needed lessons?

   b. What is the biggest lesson you are currently learning in the most challenging situation you are facing?

9. a. What do you learn about Jonah's experience?

   b. What do you learn about Jonah's significance from the Matthew passage?

Fourth Day: Read Jonah 3.

When Jonah proclaimed God's warning, Nineveh repented, and God spared the city.

10. a. What message did God command Jonah to preach in Nineveh?

    b. How did the Ninevites respond to Jonah's message? How does this embolden you regarding the power of the gospel?

11. a. Give several points about God's character from Jonah 3.

    b. How do these truths impact your daily life in a specific way? Which one is particularly meaningful?

12. Into what situation has God sent you as His witness? What have you learned?

Fifth Day: Read Jonah 4.

God questioned Jonah when he protested God's mercy to Nineveh.

13. a. What surprises you about Jonah's response?

    b. What do you think was the root cause of Jonah's anger?

14. a. How did God respond to Jonah?

    b. What words or phrases reveal God's grace and compassion (see also Exodus 34:5-7)?

15. How has this lesson challenged your perspective on God's mercy and compassion for all people?

Sixth Day: Review Jonah.

God lovingly extends mercy to all people.

16. What is your most profound takeaway from the book of Jonah? Why?

Passage Discovery (homiletics, word study, etc.) for Group and Administrative Leaders: Jonah

Lecture Notes

Next step: Read Lesson Notes.

Lesson Notes

Jonah

Focus Verse

"I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity." – Jonah 4:2b

Outline

- Jonah's Rebellion and God's Rescue – Jonah 1–2
- Jonah's Message and God's Mercy – Jonah 3
- Jonah's Anger and God's Rebuke – Jonah 4

Engage

How do you introduce yourself to other people? What defines you? We often feel most safe within boundaries we establish for ourselves. We like knowing where we belong. However, problems arise when the borders we create for ourselves separate us from others. **Our personal comfort zones can lead us to pride and arrogance in the way we categorize and relate to people who are different than we are.** We can wrongly draw dividing lines based on skin color, gender, ethnicity, economic status, or perceived intelligence. We even view others as "more sinful" than we are when, in fact, every human is a sinner. Are there people or people groups you think are beyond the reach of the gospel? Knowingly or unknowingly, our bias can prevent us from reflecting God's heart.

Every human being bears God's image. People around the world display beautiful diversity and fundamental unity. All people also share the same serious problem – sin. Jonah struggled when God called him to speak against the wickedness and violence in Nineveh, in part because of his bias against them. Did he overlook his own sin as he judged the Ninevites unworthy of God's forgiveness? Every person in every nation stands in desperate need of God's mercy. God cannot and will not be bound by human dividing lines. His love and mercy know no borders. God is impartial – He does not love one people group more than another. **God lovingly extends mercy to all people.** Our compassionate God saves all who repent of their sin and trust Him for salvation.

Who Was Jonah?

- **The Prophet:** Jonah means "dove." He was a prophet *from* Israel sent to speak *outside* Israel.
- **The Audience:** Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria – an enemy nation
- **The Message:** God's warning to Nineveh of coming destruction and His compassion for all people
- **The Images to Remember:** A great fish and withering plant

Jonah's Rebellion and God's Rescue – Jonah 1–2

Jonah's Call and God's Heart – Jonah 1:1-2

Most of what is commonly known about Jonah is gleaned from this book. However, 2 Kings 14:25 records Jonah as a prophet to Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II. **The intense struggle within Jonah, an established prophet, leads us to look more closely into his reluctance to answer God's call to Nineveh.**

God called Jonah to the people of Nineveh, a city outside Israel. Jonah resisted God's command to prophesy to a wicked people and enemy nation. **Two central themes rise throughout the entire book of Jonah – God's judgment and His mercy.** Jonah's actions and attitudes revolved around God's message and Nineveh's response.

Beyond the Borders of Israel – Isaiah 65:1b

God often deployed His prophets to non-Israelites.[1] God declared through Isaiah, "To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, 'Here am I, here am I.'" **God's prophets served with allegiance to God alone – called and ready to go wherever He sent them.**

Nineveh was a large city in Assyria, Israel's northern neighbor.[2] Shortly after Jonah's mission to Nineveh, God used Assyria to judge Israel.[3] God required the Israelites to maintain purity in worship by keeping themselves separate and distinct from foreign nations. Jonah recognized Israel's distinctiveness as God's chosen people and recipients of His mercy.[4] **That God would show compassion to such a brutal enemy repulsed Jonah.** In his mind, they were the worst of the worst.

Jonah's confrontation of violent, evil Nineveh displayed God's right as Creator to hold all people accountable and extend mercy as He chooses. **Deeper examination reveals that Jonah's commission previews God's redemptive plan to save people from all nations.[5]** Nineveh stood as a sign to Israel of God's plan to bring people from every nation to repentant faith in Him.

Nineveh's Message to Israel – Matthew 12:41

Centuries later, Jesus spoke of Nineveh, "The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here." **Nineveh's repentance served as a rebuke to Israel and revealed God's merciful compassion to the Gentiles.** God's sovereign plan of salvation always included people from every nation.[6]

1: Prophets outside Israel: 1 Kings 17:7-24; 19:15; 2 Kings 5:1-18
2: Nineveh: Genesis 10:8-12; Jonah 3:3; 4:11
3: Assyria captured Israel: 2 Kings 17
4: God chose Israel: Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 7:6-8; 14:2; 26:17-19
5: God and all nations: Romans 10:11-21; Galatians 3:7-9, 26-29
6: All peoples: Genesis 12:1-3

Jonah's Flight and God's Judgment – Jonah 1:3–2:10

Jonah rejected God's call to Nineveh. **God patiently sought Jonah even as he rebelled and ran away.** God disciplines those He loves to teach them about Himself and His purposes.[7] Jonah's flight exposed God's heart, but did not deter His plan.

Jonah Ran From God – 1:3-17

Jonah Rejected God's Plan – 1:3

At God's command to go to Nineveh, Jonah bolted. Verse 3 specifically says that Jonah fled "away from the LORD." He headed in the opposite direction of Nineveh. He paid to board a ship bound for Tarshish, a city most likely on the edge of modern-day Spain. Jonah would soon discover that God's presence and His will were inescapable.

Scripture does not explain the reasons Jonah fled, but hints at his mindset. When the sailors asked Jonah who he was, he responded first with his ethnic identity as a Hebrew.[8] Jonah's national pride likely contributed to his repulsion at God's attention toward a wicked and violent foreign nation. **Jonah's preconceived ideas about Nineveh's evil mattered more to him than God's call.**

Is Jonah's attitude uncomfortably familiar? Many have experienced a shockingly deep emotion toward people deemed notoriously evil, forgetting our own guilt before God. Like Jonah, we are not bothered to think these people should be dead or in hell forever. **God's mercy is not bound by the realm of evil.** God's kingdom reaches wider, deeper, and farther than can be imagined.[9]

Jonah could not grasp that God cared about people like the Ninevites. Faced with this bitter conflict, he rebelled. **Jonah's inner battle was real, but his response was wrong.** The prophet Habakkuk faced a similar struggle, but took his pain directly to God rather than running away from Him.[10]

God Judged Jonah – 1:4-17

After the ship set sail, God sent a terrible, life-threatening storm. Jonah, however, slept soundly below deck. **After the sailors did everything they knew to do, the ship's captain woke Jonah, commanding him to cry out to his god to save them.** Believers and unbelievers alike face storms in life. Like Jonah, believers can miss opportunities to openly attest to God and His faithfulness.

The storm showed no signs of stopping. The sailors cast lots to find out who was responsible. The lot fell on Jonah, who knew that God sent the storm because of his rebellion. Jonah's overall sensitivity to God is clear. Jonah's resistance to God's call to Nineveh reveals the depth of his prejudice as well as his distrust of God. In great love and mercy, God lovingly pursues His children when they run from Him. **God uses life's storms to awaken our responsiveness to Him.** Whether our problems are caused by sin or not, God can be trusted to accomplish His purposes through every difficulty.

Jonah confessed his responsibility for the storm and offered himself saying, "… throw me into the sea … and it will become calm." Jonah admitted his guilt and chose to protect others rather than himself. Jonah's godly character emerged. He was actually a devoted prophet who learned the consequences of disobedience in a painful way.

7: God's discipline: Proverbs 3:11-12; Hebrews 12:5-11
8: Jonah, a Hebrew: Jonah 1:9
9: God's kingdom: Luke 6:27-36; John 3:16; 18:36
10: Habakkuk's question: Habakkuk 1–2

Instead of immediately throwing Jonah overboard, the sailors unsuccessfully attempted to row to land. They then begged God not to hold them accountable for Jonah's death. With desperate prayer, they tossed Jonah overboard and the sea grew calm. Having witnessed God's power, the sailors worshiped the Lord on the suddenly calm sea. However, Jonah plunged toward death under the swirling water. **God spared Jonah's life by sending a huge fish to swallow him.** He remained in the fish's belly for three days and three nights.

Jonah Responded to God's Judgment With Repentance – Jonah 2

Deep in the sea, Jonah repented. He prayed for God to save him. He accepted God's judgment and acknowledged his desperate need. Jonah submitted to God's right, as the Almighty Creator, to take his life: "You hurled me into the depths … I have been banished from your sight …." Jonah confessed his deep distress, but also expressed his confidence in God's mercy: "… yet I will look again toward your holy temple." **Jonah believed that God heard him.**

Jonah boldly prayed to the God who hears and helps His people. Jonah's prayer challenges us to trust God even in the most desperate of circumstances. His prayer reminds us that we can turn to God even when we face pain caused by our sin. Jonah's heartfelt prayer wove together confession and hope. He recognized God's rightful judgment and declared God as the source of salvation. Only when we turn to God can our sorrow truly turn to joy. God alone provides salvation to those who deserve judgment.

God heard Jonah's prayer. He commanded the fish to spit Jonah out onto dry land. When Jonah emerged, his God-given call had not changed. God repeated His command for Jonah to take His message to Nineveh. This time Jonah obeyed. **In love, God rescued straying Jonah and gave him a second chance to obey.**

The Sign of Jonah

Jesus validated Jonah as a sign given to Israel in Matthew 12:38-41 and Luke 11:29-32. What did Jesus mean? God sovereignly ordained Jonah to illustrate the coming Messiah. Jonah offered his life to save the sailors. Jesus offered His life to save sinners. **Jonah's three days and nights in the belly of the fish foreshadowed Jesus' three days and nights in the belly of the earth.** God brought up Jonah from his watery tomb. In the same way, God raised Jesus from His earthly tomb.

The lesson Jesus stressed through the sign of Jonah was the call to hear and respond to His message. Considering the sign of Jonah without embracing the intended message accomplishes nothing. The Jewish leaders should have connected Jonah with Jesus. **Centuries before Jesus' birth, God foreshadowed His plan of redemption and the coming Messiah.** Jonah's experience highlights God's intentional purposes that extend far beyond Israel's borders – to every nation, tribe, and language. All believers gratefully participate in God's plan of salvation that reaches all nations. Whatever your human descent, will you thank God that His plan included you?

Jonah's Message and God's Mercy – Jonah 3

Jonah's Message to Nineveh – 3:1-4

Jonah proclaimed God's warning to Nineveh – God was coming to judge them for their evil ways. As recorded for us, the message was brief and clear, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." Nineveh had no special covenant with God like Israel did. Jonah acted as the ambassador of the Creator of the universe. Foreign nations were not exempt from God's holy standard. All humanity has no excuse because God has written His law on their hearts.[11] Though issuing a warning of judgment, Jonah did not want Assyria to repent. Jonah's heart was still hard.

Nineveh Repented and God Relented – 3:5-10

Jonah traveled through the large city of Nineveh proclaiming God's warning. Upon hearing God's message, the king of Nineveh ordered a city-wide fast that even included the animals. All the people, including the king and the animals, wore sackcloth. The Ninevites cried out to God. Nineveh quickly changed from a city of proud debauchery to a city of humble repentance before God – their evil and violent ways ceased. **The people of Nineveh feared God and depended on Him for salvation.** When God saw Nineveh's repentant belief, He relented from His pending judgment.

God's warning of judgment was an act of compassion. In Jonah, Nineveh receives compassion. In Nahum, Nineveh receives judgment. The results are very opposite. In the fullness of God's purposes, justice and compassion function together harmoniously. **God warns of judgment so that people will repent and be saved.**

If God had judged Nineveh without warning, the Ninevites would have missed the opportunity to turn away from their evil and to God. Through the gospel, God offers us the same mercy. He warns of judgment, but offers a way of salvation. **God is patiently waiting before He acts in judgment, compassionately offering time for the gospel to reach all people.** When we repent and believe in Jesus, God saves us from the just penalty our sins deserve because Jesus paid the price for our sin.[12] God enables the forgiven to live a transformed life.[13]

Jonah's Anger and God's Rebuke – Jonah 4

God showed mercy to Nineveh by announcing His coming judgment. God's message through Jonah called the people of Nineveh to recognize God's presence and holy power. God also allowed them time to repent.

11: All people accountable: Romans 1:18-32; 2:15
12: God's call to repentance: Isaiah 55:6; Matthew 3:2; Acts 17:30; 1 Timothy 2:3-4; 2 Peter 3:9
13: Enablement for believers: John 14–16; Romans 6–8

Turning From Sin and Turning to God

The Doctrine of Repentance

When we think of repentance, we often think of saying "I'm sorry." True repentance involves much more than an apology or sorrow over consequences. **Repentance and faith go hand in hand.** Belief without repentance is not true saving faith. Even demons believe that God exists.[14] Likewise, repentance without belief in God's right to be obeyed yields only sorrow over sin's painful consequences.[15] Those who repent turn their backs on their sin to worship and obey the one true God.

We cannot conjure up repentance. In kindness, God leads His people to repent through the mysterious working of the Holy Spirit.[16] The Holy Spirit convicts sinners of their guilt before a holy God.[17] By God's power, repentant people receive God's mercy and desire to please Him. Jonah repented, as did Nineveh, after God confronted them with His power and holiness. **The posture of repentance leads us to pray with the tax collector, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner."[18]**

Over time, the Holy Spirit transforms a believer's heart, attitudes, and motives. Love for God along with a longing for His righteousness grows within the believer.[19] The path of spiritual growth involves ongoing repentance as God continues to purify our desires and actions. Until final glory, we must repent over and over again. We continue striving for holiness in dependence upon God's compassionate grace. Thanks be to God that His mercies are new every morning.[20]

Without turning from sin and to Christ for salvation, we walk a road that leads to eternity under God's wrath.[21] If we only repent to escape sin's consequences, our repentance is pretense. To refuse to repent while continuing in sin is to reject God's offer of mercy. Without repentance, we are left carrying our burden of sin without hope of relief. Attempts to numb the pain and escape the guilt and accompanying shame come up short.

God does not leave us in a place of despair. Do you sometimes wonder if God really forgives a sinner like you? Take heart! When you repent and confess your sins, "... he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Repentance brings supernatural peace as well as an assurance of God's love and salvation.[22] God lifts our eyes beyond our circumstances to see His greater plan for our lives. What would it look like for you to rest in this truth as you confess your sins?

14: Demons' belief: Matthew 8:29; James 2:19
15: Sorrow without repentance: Matthew 27:3; Romans 2:4-5; 2 Corinthians 7:10-11
16: God's work in repentance: John 16:8; Acts 2:38-41; 5:31; 11:18; Romans 2:4
17: Sin against God: Psalm 51
18: Cry for mercy: Luke 18:13-14
19: Repentance brings change: Matthew 3:8; 5; Acts 26:20; 1 John 1:8-9
20: God's endless mercies: Lamentations 3:22-24
21: God's wrath: John 3:36
22: Repentance and salvation: Romans 10:11-13

Jonah's Bitter Response to God's Mercy – 4:1-4

The book of Jonah would be tidier without its last chapter. However, the Scriptures honestly portray the messiness of human failings to instruct and warn us. **Despite Jonah's recent experience with God's deliverance, his anger flared because God did not judge Nineveh.** He confessed that he fled because he realized God's compassionate nature.[23] Jonah neglected to trust God to deal righteously with the guilty.

Jonah did not fully understand the depth of God's grace, compassion, slowness to anger, and abounding love. He only thought he did. God gave Jonah a front row seat to teach him this lesson. Jonah selfishly appreciated God's character when he was rescued from the belly of the great fish. **When God's character benefitted the Assyrians, Jonah was not happy with God's compassion.** Resentment filled Jonah when God acted according to His own nature in dealing with Nineveh.

Jonah thought he knew better than God. His scornful attitude toward Nineveh and his anger resurfaced. Had Jonah forgotten his desperate prayer and amazing rescue? **Jonah angrily resented God's mercy toward the people of Nineveh.** He wanted God to reserve His favor for Israel and execute strict justice upon Israel's enemies. Jonah resisted God's heart for the world. His desire to see God's love expressed to the nations stopped when Assyria was involved. The pain inflicted by them had been too much. Like many would judge a terrorist or mass murderer, Jonah thought the Assyrians deserved nothing less than judgment. God's dealings with Nineveh so angered Jonah that he asked to die.

God heard Jonah's complaint and asked him a powerful, straightforward question, "Is it right for you to be angry?" God simply called Jonah to align with what was right – with God's heart. We navigate life's challenges by trying to balance competing messages with our limited insight and warring emotions. **Wise people listen to God to determine what is right.** Trusting God means believing God alone knows the right time for compassion and the right time for judgment.

God's Corrective Lesson for Jonah – 4:5-11

God continued to pursue Jonah and teach him His ways. Jonah built a shelter east of Nineveh while he waited to see what would happen. God supernaturally caused a plant to shade Jonah's head. Jonah felt happy and comforted by the plant. However, his pleasure was short-lived. The next day, God sent a worm to eat the plant, which withered. Jonah sulked, feeling faint in the blazing sunlight. Still angry and blaming God, Jonah prayed again to die.

God aimed another penetrating question at Jonah's rebellious heart: "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" Jonah dramatically defended his anger and, for a third time, expressed his desire to die. God taught Jonah about His character through his distress. **If Jonah cared about a plant that he neither created nor tended, how much more does God care for the people and animals He created?** People made in God's image, as well as animals, filled the huge city of Nineveh. God's merciful compassion was right. Jonah was wrong.

The book of Jonah ends with a clear lesson for Jonah and people of all time. Christians can sometimes desire that the gospel only go to the people they deem deserving. The crucial message of Jonah

---

23: God's graciousness: Exodus 34:6-7

confronts our world of racism, tribalism, and national division. Is your desire for vengeance greater than your desire that people come to salvation? Do you want people who have exercised cruelty against you to be saved? **God lovingly extends mercy to all people.** He delights to forgive and restore those who repent of their sin and turn to Him.

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

God's words open and close the book of Jonah. Though the book bears Jonah's name, truth about God permeates the story. Jonah's plight reveals the mercy, wisdom, compassion, judgment, and purpose of Almighty God. Jonah rebelliously rejected God's heart for Nineveh and resisted His call to go there. Jonah quickly learned he could not flee from God as he found himself praying desperately from inside a large fish. God rescued His reluctant prophet and recommissioned him to warn Nineveh of impending judgment. Even after his experience in the belly of the fish, Jonah continued to struggle against God's ways. Jonah was happy to receive mercy, but resented God's intervention when the people of Nineveh repented. **Jonah failed to see that he was like the Ninevites – a sinner in need of God's rescue.**

In spite of Jonah's failings, God used Jonah and Nineveh for His good purposes. God pursued Jonah to teach him, Israel, and us about His heart to redeem sinners. **God's mercy is not limited by human boundaries.** Jonah's time in the fish pointed toward Jesus Christ, who suffered God's judgment of mankind's sin. Jesus descended into the belly of the earth and rose in victory over death. God's mercy is freely offered in Jesus Christ. Frederick William Faber penned these words in his hymn, "There's a Wideness in God's Mercy": "For the love of God is broader than the measures of the mind, and the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind."[a]

Apply It

We can easily criticize Jonah's disdain for Nineveh and his childlike temper tantrums. Sadly, the desire to dominate and feel superior to others continues in us. Looking down on people of a different ethnicity, nationality, class, or culture allows evil and hatred to prevail. This passage beckons us to delve deeply into our own hearts. How are we like Jonah? In what ways do we refuse to extend God's mercy to people who have caused us or others great pain? The modern world has not overcome deep schisms between peoples and nations. Far too often, even Christians divide over secondary issues. We prefer comfortable relationships with people who agree with us. How will we reach the world for Christ if we separate ourselves from people who are not like us? How can we so enjoy God's lavish kindness while failing to extend His grace to others? **God calls His children, the recipients of His mercy, to freely offer His love to others.** What individuals or groups of people do you ignore or devalue, even unknowingly? With whom would God desire for you to share community and celebrate the glories of His grace?

---

a: "There's a Wideness in God's Mercy," Frederick William Faber, 1862, public domain

While Jonah would likely have intellectually agreed that God's mercy was available to all, his emotional response to God's call catapulted him into dangerous rebellion. He resisted God's command to preach in Nineveh because he deemed the people unworthy. Jonah failed to love his neighbors as God commanded. **The human tendency to assume greater knowledge than the almighty God of eternity continues.** People today proudly believe they have a right to define issues on their own terms. Why would we think we possess greater wisdom or a more enlightened perspective than God? As believers, the way we contend for God's standards in our world matters. Jonah offered a harsh message, but resisted inviting people to know God and His ways. The way we love and engage with others matters as much as upholding what is right and true.

Believers also resist God, but perhaps in ways that seem less glaring. There is much to learn from Jonah. **Every time our narrow view, deficient knowledge, or emotional response clashes with God, we must learn to choose God's way.** God's prohibitions protect us. His commands lead us to flourish. Twice, God questioned Jonah by asking, "Is it right?" Lord, give us hearts that love and seek what is right! How are you resisting God's ways because you have a better idea? Pour out your questions to Him like Habakkuk did. Do not run away like Jonah. God can be trusted, even when He has not fully revealed His purposes.

Ultimately, Jonah's story reveals amazing truth about God's greatness and goodness. **The biggest message of this book is not Jonah's resistance or Nineveh's peril, but God's heart for the people He created.** God loves all people without partiality. People from every nation and people group are equally created in His image and will be represented in His eternal kingdom.[24] Did Jonah deserve God's grace more than the people of Nineveh? God's mercy never depends on the worthiness of the people He so loves. God reveals truth and warns of the consequences of failing to turn to Him. He cares for our physical needs and has given His Son to redeem us from sin's grip. God's mercy is wide, and His love runs deep. How will you praise God today for the ways He has extended grace to you?

24: All nations: Revelation 5:9-10; 7:9

All Scripture quotations in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ® NIV ®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Amos – Upholding God's Justice

Amos

Lesson Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 12 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. After listening to the lecture, what aspect of Jonah's story most convicted you? Why?

2. How did the notes help you realize ways you resist God? What did you learn about God, and how does that help you?

Second Day: Read Amos 1–2.

Amos proclaimed God's judgment on eight nations.

3. a. List the eight nations Amos charged with the repeated phrase "For three sins … even for four."

© BSF 2022 (This material may be downloaded from mybsf.org and used by BSF class members in connection with their personal BSF class studies. It may not be otherwise reproduced without BSF's written permission.)

b. How would you summarize the nature of the national sins upon which God pronounced judgment?

c. What was the difference between the sins of the other nations and the sins of Judah and Israel?

4. a. How are these kinds of transgressions against God and people evident in the world today?

b. In what way might God be calling you to respond?

Third Day: Read Amos 3–6.

Amos leveled specific charges against Israel.

5. a. From 3:3-8, what were the visible events listed and their unseen causes?

b. How did this cause-and-effect relationship relate to Israel's situation at this time?

6. List the specific sins Amos confronted in 3:9–4:13 and the resulting judgment coming.

7. a. What phrase appears five times in Amos 4:6-13? Give verses. Why is this significant?

b. What calamities in our day might God use to cause people to turn to Him?

8. Give the important admonition Amos declared in each of the following verses. What does each mean to you?

   4:12

   5:4

   5:14

   5:15

9. List those to whom Amos pronounced a woe – a statement of judgment with sorrow and grief – in the following verses. In what ways do you relate to each woe?

   5:18

   6:1

Fourth Day: Read Amos 7:1–9:10.

Amos delivered visions of God's judgment on Israel.

10. List the subject and results of each of Amos' visions.

    7:1-3

    7:4-6

    7:7-9

    8:1-3

    9:1-10

11. What do you learn about Amos from the historic interlude in 7:10-17?

12. a. What do you learn about God and people from these verses?

    b. How does that truth impact your daily life?

Fifth Day: Read Amos 9:11-15.

Amos spoke God's promises of Israel's future restoration and salvation.

13. a. What specific promises did Amos declare to give the people of Israel hope?

    b. Which verse indicates that God's blessings extend beyond Israel to the world?

14. a. How do you see the promise of Christ's return in these verses (see Acts 15:15-17)?

    b. In what ways do these verses give you hope (see John 10:10, 28-29)?

Sixth Day: Review Amos.

God justly judges all who persist in sin, but gives life to all who humbly seek Him.

15. Write a prayer of adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and petition based on what God showed you in Amos.

Passage Discovery (homiletics, word study, etc.) for Group and Administrative Leaders: Amos

Lecture Notes

Next step: Read Lesson Notes.

Lesson Notes

Amos

Focus Verse

"Seek the Lord and live ..." – Amos 5:6a

Outline

- A Look Around: Indictment of Eight Nations – Amos 1–2
- A Look Within: Charges Against Israel – Amos 3–6
- A Look Ahead: Future Judgment and Restoration – Amos 7–9

Engage

Does God see the injustice, corruption, and poverty in our world? Will He allow the proud and arrogant to continue unchallenged forever? At times, even believers can question God's goodness and whether following Him is worth it. Scripture offers God's perspective on these very real concerns. Self-indulgent and corrupt people may enjoy their wealth and power for a little time. However, they remain accountable to God and ultimately will face His judgment. God warns of a coming day when His patience will end abruptly. **God is holy and just – the righteous Judge of all people.**

God sent Amos to declare His judgment against the proud complacency, violence, and false religion of the wealthy as well as the corrupt people in Israel. God does not care about wealth or social status.[1] He opposes the self-righteous. God seeks people who genuinely express their love for Him through heartfelt worship and love for others. He brings down the proud, but exalts the humble.[2] **God justly judges all who persist in sin, but gives life to all who humbly seek Him.**

Who Was Amos?

- **The Prophet:** Amos – herdsman and farmer from Tekoa, Judah, whose name means "burden-bearer"
- **The Audience:** The northern kingdom of Israel during a time of political stability and economic prosperity
- **The Message:** Exposing and confronting Israel's sham religion, social injustice, and abuse of wealth and power
- **The Images to Remember:** The lion, baskets of fruit, and plumb line

---

1: God does not favor wealth: Psalm 73; Luke 21:1-4; James 2:1-9
2: God exalts the humble: Isaiah 2:11-12,17; Daniel 4:37; Matthew 23:12; Luke 14:11; 18:14

A Look Around: Indictment of Eight Nations – Amos 1–2

Amos primarily proclaimed God's accusations and judgments to the northern kingdom of Israel. He prophesied two years before an earthquake fulfilled his prophecy and proved that he spoke with God's authority.

Amos, the Shepherd Prophet – 1:1

A shepherd and farmer, Amos owned land and livestock and likely would have been considered a wealthy man. Amos prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II in Israel. At this time, Israel's expanded borders, political stability, and economic prosperity could be compared to the time of Solomon.[3] Prosperity tests allegiance to God in a way poverty cannot.[4] **Israel's external success led to religious complacency, social corruption, and arrogance.** God warned of coming judgment because His people had broken their covenant with Him.[5]

God positioned Amos to confront Israel's stubbornness and abuse of wealth. **Amos prophesied with vivid imagery designed by God to shock Israel out of complacent pride and callous cruelty.** Amos prophesied about imminent judgment but also of the day of the Lord – the great final judgment at the second coming of Jesus. Amos ended his prophecy with promises of eternal restoration for Israel and people from all nations.

God Roared From His Temple – 1:2

As the lion roars with kingly authority over the animal kingdom, God roared as King of all creation from Mount Zion, the site of Jerusalem. God's powerful proclamations through Amos foretold devastation as God called first Israel's enemies and then His own people to account.

God's Thundering Indictments – 1:3–2:16

After God's booming voice announced His powerful presence, God leveled charges against eight nations. Like the summary statements of a prosecuting attorney, Amos delivered God's conclusion with the repeated declaration: "For three sins … even for four, I will not relent." These numbers signified the overflowing transgressions of the nations He condemned. All people and nations stood accountable to God.

Indictments Against Israel's Enemies – 1:3–2:3

Amos first indicted six foreign nations for brutally violating the basic way people should treat each other. God rendered His verdict against Damascus (Syria), Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab for their cruel and savage acts against others. These nations inflicted harm without pity – enslaving captives, murdering pregnant women, and desecrating human bones. Though these nations

---

3: Jeroboam II's prosperity: 2 Kings 14:23-29
4: Challenge of wealth: Deuteronomy 8:10-14; Psalm 62:10; Proverbs 30:8-9; Matthew 19:23-24; 1 Timothy 6:6-10
5: Covenant judgment: Deuteronomy 28–30

did not have a covenant with God like Israel, their humanity made them accountable to God for their abuse of people made in God's image. They would receive back what they had inflicted on others.[6]

God sees all and judges according to His holy standards. Military might and human defenses cannot stand before God's fiery judgment. These punishments may sound harsh to us but fit the severity of the crimes. **God's judgments flow out of His holy and just character.** Any violation of God's holy law deserves death.[7] When we are tempted to think of God as unfair or unjust, we need to remember that God's standards and not our own determine what is right.

Indictments Against Judah – 2:4-5

The list of national offenses continued as Amos' indictments circled ever closer to his ultimate target, the kingdom of Israel. **Amos pronounced judgment on Judah for rejecting God's law and seeking false gods**. Being charged among these foreign nations would have offended the self-righteousness and assumed privilege of God's people. God desires for His people to reflect Him, not imitate the world.

Indictments Against Israel – 2:6-16

From here forward, most of Amos' prophecy focused on God's accusations against Israel. **God specifically condemned Israel for selling the righteous and needy for profit, abusing the poor, committing gross acts of sexual sin, and using God's temple for ill-gotten gains.** By rejecting God, Israel refused His good and just standards for worship and life. Their rebellion led to violence, corruption, and suffering.

Israel not only violated natural law, but also the holy law God had specifically entrusted to them. Israel's disobedience required punishment. God disclosed the truth that shattered Israel's delusion of well-being. Israel had rejected God and trusted in their own strength. **He stripped Israel bare for not loving and gratefully praising Him as the only source of true security and prosperity.**

Ingratitude leads to other sins.[8] Arrogance, pride, and selfishness rise within us when we fail to acknowledge God as the source of our blessings. We can easily relate success to our efforts or special talents when God alone equips us with the gifts to work effectively and the strength to work hard. **God loves to give good gifts, but wants His people to respond with sincere praise and obedience.**

A Look Within: Charges Against Israel – Amos 3–6

God's Coming Judgment – Amos 3

Amos confirmed that he spoke with the power and authority of the God who had rescued them from Egypt. Israel's liberation from Egypt stood as a historical hallmark of their unique relationship as God's people.[9] **God warned Israel that lack of covenantal faithfulness as His chosen people**

6: Treatment of others returned: Matthew 7:2
7: Sin deserves death: Genesis 2:16-17; Romans 6:23
8: Slippery slope of ingratitude: Romans 1:21
9: Israel in Egypt: Exodus 1–14

would lead to His judgment.[10] With a series of questions, Amos offered obvious cause-and-effect scenarios to point to punishment awaiting Israel. God's warnings, like a lion's roar, should rightly awaken fear of His coming judgment. God declared to the world that Israel did "not know how to do right." As an act of judgment against Israel's oppressive evil and brutality, God would send an enemy to overrun and plunder Israel.

Amidst Amos' graphic imagery, God offered a ray of hope. He would preserve a remnant of His people in the same way a shepherd rescues part of an animal from a lion's mouth.[11] **Even in judgment, God would show mercy to His people and not destroy them completely.** His plan of redemption continued despite Israel's sins. God's sustaining mercy never fails. God often accomplishes His sovereign purposes through events in human history.

Israel's Refusal to Repent – Amos 4

Amos glaringly exposed Israel's stubborn rebellion against God, who faithfully sought her. An enemy would destroy Israel's blasphemous altars and stop her criminal luxury. The women, the "cows of Bashan," who crushed the needy to indulge their lavish comfort would be taken captive. Amos reminded Israel of five times God had called them to repent. God designed scarcity of food and water, disease, drought, and fire to awaken their hearts to seek Him. **Despite God's discipline, Israel did not return to Him.** Amos delivered a stark warning to Israel – "prepare to meet your God."

Our actions reveal the true state of our hearts. Israel sinned inwardly through pride, self-reliance, greed, and self-righteousness. Israel sinned outwardly through injustice, domination, and oppression. God cares about how we live and treat others. Ultimately, Israel sinned toward God by disobeying His moral law and rejecting Him as God.

Israel's Verdict Announced – Amos 5–6

God's Lament Over Israel – 5:1-3

God did not rejoice over Israel's calamity but grieved the suffering required by their refusal to repent. Israel would fall – deserted and forsaken with no one to restore her. God gave two startling depictions of this coming desolation as only 100 would remain in a city of 1,000 and only 10 in a town of 100. Great hardship awaited God's people.

God's lament over Israel demonstrates His heart toward errant people. He grieves our sin and rebellion. God wants people to trust Him for salvation. He desires that we reflect His goodness and mercy.[12] God longs to restore sinners and make them whole, bringing fruitfulness to their lives.

10: God's covenant with Israel: Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-21; Exodus 19–24; Deuteronomy 5; 28–32
11: Remnant rescued: Romans 11:1-5
12: Reflecting God's character: Matthew 5:48; Luke 6:35-36; Ephesians 2:10

God's Appeal to Israel – 5:4-27

"Seek Me and Live" – 5:4-13

Only by following God do we truly live. **Against the backdrop of coming judgment and impending death, God issued a life-giving call to Israel: "Seek me and live."** God would destroy their unholy altars and blasphemous worship. God, who set glorious constellations in the sky and filled the seas with water, would hold them accountable for their oppression of the poor.

"Seek Good, Not Evil" – 5:14-17

God's message expanded with Amos' second appeal: "Seek good, not evil." God wanted Israel to live as His covenant people. Reflecting His own heart, God called them to "hate evil, love good" and to "maintain justice in the courts." When God's people walk with Him, they increasingly love what He loves and hate what He hates. God offered His people, sitting on the brink of judgment, an opportunity to choose life and seek good. Perhaps God would relent from His judgment if Israel sought Him.

Israel's failure pictures humanity's desperate need for a Savior. Reading the Old Testament should cause us to recognize ourselves in these ancient accounts. People have not changed, but neither has God. His arms remain open wide as He calls sin-sick nations and broken people to turn to Him.

God's Declaration of Inescapable Judgment – 5:18–6:14

God's statements of "woe" reflected the sober reality His people faced. **God declared that because Israel chose evil over good, they also chose His judgment over salvation.** Like someone who fled a lion only to meet a bear or entered their house only to be bitten by a snake, the day of the Lord was inescapable.

Israel dishonored God with worship practices and religious festivals that reeked of idolatry. Centuries earlier, King David wrote, "You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings ... a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise" (Psalm 51:16-17). True worship is not checking off a list of religious responsibilities. **God desires that we worship Him in humility, love, and obedience.**

In his second "woe," Amos confronted the complacency and pride of the "notable men" in the capitals of Judah and Israel. Foolishly proud and falsely secure, these men pursued pleasure, comfort, and ease. They faced God's judgment because they failed to acknowledge that God had given them everything. **Pride builds on lies, not God or His truth.** The only source of life is God Himself: "For in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28a).

A Look Ahead: Future Judgment and Restoration – Amos 7–9

God gave Amos five visions of coming judgment. The first four visions pointed to imminent judgment awaiting Israel. The fifth vision depicts the final day of judgment, the day of the Lord.

God, the Righteous Judge

The Doctrine of Judgment of Believers and Unbelievers

The topic of judgment offends many people. Shouldn't God just love people? The Bible speaks a lot about judgment. God's justice demands that sin be punished. Without exception, all people sin. No one can measure up to God's perfect standards; therefore no one can escape God's judgment by obeying His law.[13] **Without saving faith in Jesus, we are left to face God's judgment solely on our own merit, which can never be enough.**

God enacts two primary kinds of judgment – punitive and evaluative. Punitive judgment involves God's punishment of those who do not trust His Son for salvation. Without faith in Christ, people bear the weight of their own sin before God. Believers – those justified by Jesus' death and declared righteous by God – await only God's evaluative judgment.[14] God will reward believers for their faithful obedience and work for Him. Through the Holy Spirit's power, believers love God and others as an outward expression of saving faith. The apostle John wrote: "Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth" (1 John 3:18).

Failure to accept the concepts of sin and judgment does not change the certainty of personal guilt and accountability to God. **To reject salvation through Jesus is to face eternal life under God's wrath.[15]** This is like saying to God, "I have no need of the grace you offer." Without God's forgiving grace, we get what we ask for. The Bible describes eternal punishment as a dreadful state – a place of torment, weeping, and unending suffering.[16]

If we understand our inability to solve the problem of our sin and its rightful judgment, we will humbly call on God to save us. **Our grateful hearts cannot fully capture the wonder that Christ took punishment He did not deserve to give us righteous standing we have not earned.** The apostle Paul urges us to "live a life worthy of the calling" we have received and press on "toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called" us.[17] Beyond that amazing truth, God will even reward believers for the faith and good deeds they have performed in the power of His Spirit. A bright eternity, free from condemnation and judgment, awaits believers.[18]

The First Three Visions – 7:1-9

A Vision of Locusts – 7:1-3

God showed Amos that He planned to send locust swarms to destroy Israel's crops, a message repeated by the prophet Joel. Amos interceded for Israel, pleading that Israel was too small to survive. The Lord relented, and Israel was spared.

13: Judgment for sin: Romans 2:5-8,12; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10
14: Imputed righteousness: Romans 1:17; 4:5; 10:4; 2 Corinthians 5:21; James 1:12
15: Remaining wrath: John 3:36
16: Eternal judgment: Luke 16:19-31; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9; Revelation 20:15
17: Live worthy: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Ephesians 4:1; Philippians 3:14
18: Believers' inheritance: 1 Peter 1:4; 5:4

A Vision of Fire – 7:4-6

God told Amos that fire would consume the land. Again, Amos prayed and begged God to spare Israel. The sovereign Lord relented in response to Amos' prayer.

Amos' intercession prefigures a future Prophet who intercedes on behalf of His people. Like Israel, we are powerless to deal with our own sin. **God provided the way to salvation through the mediation of His Son,** who is alive and always able to intercede for any who repent and believe in Him.[19]

A Vision of a Plumb Line – 7:7-9

In this vision, Amos saw the Lord holding a plumb line by a straight and solid wall. **The Lord declared that He had measured Israel against His plumb line and that the nation failed to satisfy His holy standards.** With firm solidarity, the Lord declared, "I will spare them no longer."

An Interlude About Amos and Amaziah – 7:10-17

Amos paused his prophecy to recount an example of Israel's stubborn unrepentance. Amaziah, the priest at Bethel, accused Amos of stirring up a rebellion against the king. Amaziah rejected Amos and his message and tried to send him back to Judah. Amos recounted God's call that took him from life as a shepherd to his role as God's prophet. With God's authority, Amos pronounced God's judgment on Amaziah and Israel. Amaziah would die in a pagan land, and Israel would be taken into exile. Amaziah's negative example teaches an important lesson. **Slowness to accept God's warnings and refusal to acknowledge accountability to God brings devastating present and eternal consequences.**

Two More Visions – 8:1–9:10

A Vision of a Basket of Ripe Fruit – 8:1-14

The Lord confirmed that Israel stood ready for judgment by showing Amos a vision of ripe fruit. **Israel's sins had made them plump and ripe for judgment.** God declared His verdict – "The time is ripe for my people Israel; I will spare them no longer." God called them once more to repent of their brutal abuse of the needy and poor among them. We are to share God's concern for the marginalized.

God promised to shake Israel's pride and false sense of security with an earthquake. Israel's continual refusal to repent would bring physical calamity, as Israel's prosperity dried up like Egypt's river. Israel would suffer a famine, not just for food and water, but a "famine of hearing the words of the Lord." The removal of God's Word would cause darkness, mourning, and spiritual starvation. Surely these words offer a serious warning about how we see and treat others as we live in a world that devalues God and His Word today.

19: Jesus' intercession: Hebrews 7:25

A Vision of the Lord by the Altar – 9:1-10

In Amos' final vision, God stood beside the altar and declared there was no escape from His judgment. **God watched over Israel "for harm and not for good."** His holiness could not allow Israel's self-righteous pride to continue.

Two years after Amos prophesied, an earthquake shook Israel like a sieve, shaking the sinners out of the land.[20] God again offered a promise hidden within His message of judgment: "Yet I will not totally destroy the descendants of Jacob." God has a plan to redeem and restore; sin does not have the final victory. **God's sovereign mercy always accompanies His sovereign judgment – mercy sought is mercy gained.**

Israel's situation offers a dire warning for people of all ages. A promised day of final judgment awaits all mankind. There is no neutral ground or way to hide from God. The way we respond to God determines whether we will live eternally in the refuge of His loving presence or forever under His wrath. **No one can hide from God.**

A Promise of Future Restoration – 9:11-15

A welcome promise of blessing followed God's message of impending doom. **God would continue to build up the faithful remnant of Jacob and rebuild the house of David.**[21] Old Testament prophecy often contains dual fulfillments – pointed to both a near historical reference and a distant future event. The people of Amos' day experienced God's judgment through an earthquake and Israel's eventual destruction and capture by Assyria. The reference to the "day of the Lord" by Amos and other prophets points to the final judgment at Jesus' second coming.

God also promised to preserve a remnant of Israel. God indeed sustained a faithful portion of Israel through their exile. In the distant future context, the promise looks to "that day" when God will establish His kingdom at Jesus' return to earth. God will bring His people, along with "all the nations that bear my name," into their homeland forever where they are "never again to be uprooted." This eternal kingdom will bring restoration, prosperity, abundance, and feasting. When Jesus returns, He will both judge sinners and restore those who sought Him. This explains the way Amos pairs judgment and restoration in these future promises. Every believer's eternal future is bright and glorious. **God justly judges all who persist in sin, but gives life to all who humbly seek Him.**

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Israel's systemic oppression of the poor and abuse of the needy revealed their selfish and evil hearts. They worshiped profit and wealth, abused others for their own gain, and oppressed the suffering. Despite their perceived sense of security, their sins left them defenseless before the all-holy

---

20: Earthquake: Amos 1:1; Zechariah 14:5
21: David's dynasty upheld: Luke 1:32-33

and powerful God, Creator of heaven and earth. Israel would not enjoy the fruits of their exploitation and unjust ways. Amos prophesied judgment, but also called Israel to seek the Lord and live. Along with the coming judgment, God provided the way of salvation and promised mercy.

After lengthy warnings of looming judgment, the last few lines of Amos' prophecy offered a ray of hope. God would faithfully keep His promise to save a remnant within Israel. **God condemns evil and judges sin, but He also always provides a way of salvation.** Amos reminds us of another Shepherd-Prophet – the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus came warning of coming judgment, but sacrificed Himself to provide a way of life and salvation. God, the righteous Judge, knows the reality of sin and the righteous necessity of judgment. God's heart is compassionate toward the wayward. Amos' words echo from God's heart through the ages: "Seek me and live."

Apply It

Amos exposed the selfish indulgence and love of luxury that numbed the rich people in Israel to the suffering they inflicted on others. The issues Amos confronted have not disappeared in our modern world. People continue to abuse others for personal gain. The poor are still ignored and mistreated. Even believers can place far too much value on personal comfort and ease. We fail to see suffering as God's loving plan for our spiritual growth.[22] Life on this earth tempts us to overvalue passing pleasures and our own preferences. Do you see your home, income, and possessions as gifts God has given you to steward? **The way we live our lives and treat others matters to God.** We cannot say we love God if we fail to protect the welfare of others. How can you enjoy God's gifts in a way that honors Him and other people?

Amos confronted Israel's specific sins and announced coming judgment. He lamented the sad spiritual state of God's people and called them to repent and turn to God. He boldly declared, "prepare to meet your God." People today do not think much about their accountability to God. However, every human ever born will stand before God. **In love and mercy, God offers a way to "prepare" to meet Him.** God calls people to take refuge in Christ, who bore the judgment their sins deserve. Because of Jesus, believers are blessed to "meet God" in joyful, daily dependence and surrender. And one day, His unveiled face will usher God's children into a glorious eternity in His presence. While waiting for that day, how are you helping others to prepare to meet God? Do you see the gospel message as a personal possession and a driving passion?

Evil often appears to have the upper hand. Despite supposed societal advancement, age-old issues divide people and erupt constantly. Christians often condemn the culture and retreat into zones that feel insulated and safe. Certainly, we must recognize the spiritual peril people face. What is God's purpose for His people today? God raised up Amos and other prophets to speak His message into their current situations. **God positions and equips believers to live and speak for Him in our current age.** Our display of mercy points people to God's mercy. Should we run *from* the chaos or *into* the mess with the only true message of hope? As evil escalates and Jesus' return draws closer, believers need not shrink back from the hope of their calling and the power of the gospel. In hardship or prosperity, through suffering or thriving, God has placed you at the point in time and space He has intended.[23] God gives His children everything they need to speak and live for Him in an evil world. Will you remain silent or speak up? God's judgment remains certain, but His way of salvation is still open. To whom is God sending you?

22: The inevitability of suffering: Acts 9:16; Romans 5:3-4; 8:17-18; 1 Peter 3:14
23: Appointed times and places: Acts 17:26

All Scripture quotations in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ® NIV ®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Joel and Obadiah – Hope Amid Judgment

Joel and Obadiah

Lesson Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 13 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What truth from the lecture did God use to convict you about ways you love comfort or accept complacency? In what specific way did God call you to obedience and surrender?

2. How did the notes on Amos help you recognize God's plan for the world? In what way were you led to think about His priorities for your daily life?

Second Day: Read Joel 1:1–2:17.

Joel predicted an invasion of locusts sent as an instrument of God's judgment.

3. a. How does Joel describe the locust invasion and its results in chapter 1?

© BSF 2022 (This material may be downloaded from mybsf.org and used by BSF class members in connection with their personal BSF class studies. It may not be otherwise reproduced without BSF's written permission.)

b. What escalation do you see in Joel's description in 2:1-11?

c. Give Joel's primary message from 2:12-17, including internal and external actions presented to the people on God's behalf.

4. a. Which truths about God are most meaningful to you from 2:12-14?

b. Explain the difference between true and false repentance – rending your heart and not just your garments (see 2 Chronicles 7:14).

5. How has God used difficult circumstances to call you to Himself?

Third Day: Read Joel 2:18-32.

Joel proclaimed a message of hope for the people of Israel.

6. What did Joel prophesy in 2:18-27 that gave the people of Israel hope?

7. a. Read Joel 2:28-32 with Acts 2:1-27. What part of this prophecy was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost?

b. Which part of Joel's prophecy seems still future or not yet fully fulfilled?

c. What encouragement do you draw from these verses?

8. What do you learn about the Holy Spirit from the following verses?

   John 16:7-15

   Acts 1:8

   Romans 8:9-16

   2 Corinthians 3:17-18

   Galatians 5:22-23

Fourth Day: Read Joel 3.

Joel prophesied God's judgment of the nations and Israel's restoration.

The word "Jehoshaphat" means "God judges." This chapter foretells God's intervention in judgment as all nations gather against Israel and Jerusalem in the last great battle.

9. List several things that will happen at this judgment according to Joel 3:1-2, 9-21.

10. a. In what specific ways does God promise to restore and bless Judah in Joel 3:17-21?

    b. Which of these promises have not yet been fulfilled?

11. What do you find either comforting or challenging from Joel about God and judgment?

Fifth Day: Read Obadiah.

Obadiah prophesied the downfall of Edom.

The Edomites were descendants of Esau and considered a "brother" nation of Israel.

12. From Obadiah 1:1-14, what was Edom's root sin, and why is that sin particularly damaging?

13. a. In what ways did Obadiah describe Edom's "unbrotherly" actions against Israel (see also Genesis 25:19-34 and Numbers 20:14-21)?

    b. How might individuals or nations sin in this way today?

14. List the promises about Israel's future recorded in Obadiah 1:15-21.

15. How does the promise of the Lord's ultimate victory and certain rule encourage you?

Sixth Day: Review Joel and Obadiah.

God warns of coming judgment, but offers hope and restoration.

16. What stands out to you about God from studying Joel and Obadiah – His character and actions? How does this truth impact your life?

No homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders

Lecture Notes

Next step: Read Lesson Notes.

Lesson Notes

Joel and Obadiah

Focus Verse

"Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity." – Joel 2:13

"But on Mount Zion will be deliverance; it will be holy, and Jacob will possess his inheritance." – Obadiah 1:17

Outline

- Joel's Prophecy of the Day of the Lord – Joel
- Obadiah's Prophecy of Edom's Judgment – Obadiah

Engage

We love good news. We prefer movies that end happily, a profitable bottom line, and solutions that ease pain. But can we be truly secure if we seek bliss but ignore hard truths? Does shallow happiness truly satisfy? A true perspective on life and eternity requires embracing difficult realities. God sets the perfect example. He does not withhold bad news, even as He offers hope and rescue. God reveals the danger and damage of sin. He warns of coming judgment on people and nations. **God infuses hope into harsh and painful circumstances with His compassionate call and plan for rescue.** God's holiness demands that sin and sinners are judged. God's mercy offers the way to salvation and reconciliation.

Joel and Obadiah, two Old Testament prophets, faithfully proclaimed God's message. They mirrored God's heart as they blended hard truth and steadfast hope. God loves His people too much to sit idly by while they cruise toward judgment. He does not ignore the damage inflicted on His people by their enemies. God sent His representatives to point out sin, call for repentance, and offer hope. God's heart and posture have not changed. **God warns of coming judgment, but offers hope and restoration.** Sin's curse has left every one of us utterly corrupted. However, God made a way of salvation for those who turn to Him. You are a sinner, but God sent a Savior – His own Son, who made a way for you to truly flourish no matter what life brings. The bad news makes way for good news that elevates the hope only God can provide.

Joel's Prophecy of the Day of the Lord – Joel 1–3

This week's lesson combines two prophetic books – Joel and Obadiah. Joel prophesied to Judah; Obadiah warned Edom. **While God aimed their diverse messages at two different target audiences, God's overarching message in both books revealed His heart and offered hope for His people.**

A Foretaste of the Day of the Lord – 1:1–2:17

Though scholars debate the timing of Joel's prophecy, many place Joel among the earliest prophets. Joel mentions the Philistines, Sabeans, Edomites, and Egyptians – prominent enemy nations prior to the exile of Judah and Israel.[1] **Because Joel's message centers around Jerusalem and Mount Zion upon which Jerusalem is built, Joel seems to speak to the southern kingdom of Judah.**[2] Joel used the term "Israel" to indicate the entire nation – both kingdoms. He never referred to only the 10 tribes of the northern kingdom.[3]

Joel writes as God's spokesman and with His authority. He presents the majestic Lord, enthroned in heaven and ruling over Judah and the earth. **Joel confidently understood that God engages with His creation to reveal His character, accomplish His will, and demonstrate His authority.**

The Locusts – 1

The Devastation – 1:1-7

In a time of prosperity, the people of Judah became complacent toward God. What does it take to awaken spiritually lethargic people? **In wisdom, power, and sovereignty, God deployed repeated waves of ravenous locusts to the land of Judah.** The prophet Joel heralded the noisy and destructive swarms as God's wake-up call to compel His people to repent. In a beautiful blend of poetry and prophecy, Joel described the successive locust attacks that stripped the land bare. These flying grasshopper-like insects have continually threatened Africa and the Middle East, with one swarm once estimated to number over 24 billion.

Who Was Joel?

- **The Prophet:** Joel means "Yahweh is God."
- **The Audience:** Judah during a time of national calamity
- **The Message:** The coming of the day of the Lord and a call to repentance
- **The Image to Remember:** Locusts

1: Enemy nations: Joel 3:4, 8, 19
2: Jerusalem and Mount Zion: Joel 2:1, 15, 23, 32; 3:1, 6, 8, 16-18
3: Joel's references to Israel: Joel 2:27; 3:2, 16

The Day of the Lord

"The day of the Lord" emerges as Joel's prominent theme.[4] This term appears throughout the Bible referring to God's specific intervention on earth, most often His judgment. The day of the Lord is not tied to one specific date, but rather a general expression of God's wrath and judgment on sin. The day of the Lord also incorporates God's rescue of the faithful – those who turn to Him for salvation. The prophets often spoke of present or coming judgments that prefigured the last great day of the Lord described in Revelation.[5] Joel followed this pattern as he revealed the reality of judgment and called people to restoration through repentance.

Joel offered the present physical destruction of Judah's land as a spiritual opportunity for God's people. Old Testament prophets spoke God's message into current situations, but often prefigured future events as well. Joel's application of Judah's present calamity also pointed to future judgment.

The Call to Lament – 1:8-20

God often uses events that show our mortality and lack of control to get our attention. He shakes us up to wake us up. **Joel urged people from all ranks of society in Judah to wake up and weep.** He called for them to wear sackcloth and mourn not just their physical losses, but more importantly, their sin. Joel summoned the drunkards, priests, farmers, and laborers to cry out to God. Joel even incorporated the cattle and wild animals in the dire circumstances facing Judah. The consequences of mankind's sin mysteriously involve creation.[6]

Joel 1:15 directly connects Judah's destruction with the day of the Lord. **These catastrophic circumstances did not come as a random act of nature, but as an expression of God's judgment.** "Alas for that day! For the day of the LORD is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty." In human understanding, we sometimes struggle to see anything difficult or devastating as ordained by God. How do natural disasters or other troubling current events intersect with God and His plan? God certainly uses painful disruption to awaken people spiritually and accomplish His greater purposes. We cannot fully explain everything that happens, but God's sovereign control can be trusted.

The Invaders – 2:1-11

Joel sounded the alarm – "Blow the trumpet in Zion" – as he called the people of Judah to prepare for the invasion of a massive army. Was Joel again seeing the locusts or was this a literal army? His description blends the two, but his message clearly points to God's imminent judgment. Joel used language often associated with the final days of the earth – disintegration of heavenly bodies and massive destruction.[7] The disruption of creation draws people's attention to what is happening. Joel leaves no doubt that the Lord Himself would send the enormous army as an instrument of His judgment. This dire warning sets the stage for God to work in the people's hearts.

4: The day of the Lord: Joel 1:15; 2:1,11, 31; 3:14
5: Nations' final judgment: Joel 3; Ezekiel 38–39; Daniel 2:44; Zechariah 12:3; 14:2; Acts 2:19-20; Revelation 16:16
6: Creation and mankind's sin: Romans 1:18-23
7: Heavenly disintegration: Ezekiel 32:7; Joel 3:15; Matthew 24:7; Mark 13:25; Luke 21:11, 26; Revelation 6:12; 8:12

The Call to Repentance – 2:12-17

Joel concluded this alarming trumpet call by calling the people to return to the Lord. Joel pled for deep, heartfelt repentance – "Rend your heart and not your garments." Outward formalities such as public assemblies, fasting, and mourning were insufficient. God desired deep internal repentance.[8] The people needed to acknowledge their offense against God and turn away from their sin. Joel reminded Judah of God's attributes of grace and mercy – He offered hope and a way of escape. If Judah repented, perhaps God would relent and withdraw His threatened judgment. God longed for His people to experience His goodness as they lived the life He intended for them – individually and as a nation. This message continues into the New Testament and reveals God's heart.[9]

The Forecast of the Day of the Lord – 2:18–3:21

God's Faithfulness – 2:18-27

God has good purposes in everything He does. In protective love, God warned Judah of devastating judgment and urgently sought their repentance. Evidently, the people of Judah responded to Joel's message. Joel now prophesied that God would replenish and restore the land ravaged by devouring locusts. **God not only judges sin, but He also repairs sin's damage.** God delights to bring good from hardship. He seeks to bring beauty from ashes and joy from sorrow.[10] God jealously guards the welfare of His people. Like a surgeon who cuts to heal, God will not withhold pain from our lives if that pain accomplishes His good purposes.

God's people in all ages have found comfort in the words recorded in Joel 2:25: "I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten…." How many people look back sorrowfully on years lived without regard to God? God's restorative grace brings fruitfulness to formerly barren places in a believer's life. If your heart laments wasted years, lay hold of this promise today. By His Spirit, God renews the minds and transforms the lives of those who surrender to Him.[11] **Sorrow over past years fades with the experience of God's redemptive power and growing hope in a glorious future.**

God's Spirit – 2:28-31

Joel's message shifts to a future day – "afterward." This beautiful prophecy of an outpouring of God's Spirit brought hope to the people of Joel's day. **Joel spoke of God's Spirit being poured out on all people – men and women, the young and the old.**

The magnitude of Joel's prophetic statements incorporated circumstances beyond those faced by the people of Judah in his day. Peter quoted this very promise on the day of Pentecost.[12] Jesus promised believers that His Spirit would fill them with power to be His witnesses and do His work.[13] On that day, the Holy Spirit filled believers as a rushing wind, tongues of fire, and multiplied languages, which attested to God's power and the fidelity of His promises. **A new work of the Holy Spirit began at Pentecost, fulfilling Joel's prophecy.**

8: True repentance: Isaiah 57:15; 66:2; 2 Corinthians 7:10
9: God's heart: Mark 1:14-15; Acts 3:18-22
10: Beauty from ashes: Isaiah 61:1-4
11: Renewed minds: Ezekiel 36:25-28
12: Pentecost: Acts 2:16-21
13: Jesus' promise: Acts 1:8

God's Spirit Poured Out

The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

God's plans and purposes have always incorporated the Holy Spirit's work and activity. God's own Spirit moved at creation[14] and worked through God's people.[15] The Holy Spirit activated God's words spoken by Joel to deeply impact the people of his day and foreshadow the future. In divine coordination, the Holy Spirit's work perfectly aligns with God's thoughts and intentions.

God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit work together in perfect harmony. **The Holy Spirit's work becomes deeply personal when we recognize His power in our lives.** He empowers us to renounce our self-will, sin, and rebellion against God. Wooing our hearts toward faith, the Holy Spirit leads us to Christ and salvation. The Spirit's moment-by-moment infusion of power allows a believer to live a transformed life – to obey God out of love and gratitude for His abounding grace. The Holy Spirit gives us hope as He unlocks the Bible so we can understand and apply its truth. God's life flows into the believer through His own Spirit. Our amazement at the Holy Spirit's work involves far more than facts. The Holy Spirit's presence and power reveal God's personal love in incredibly tangible ways.

When we do not recognize the Holy Spirit's presence and work, we miss much of God's involvement in our daily lives. Without the Holy Spirit's help, God's ways and His Word make no sense. Until the Holy Spirit awakens our dead hearts and minds, we are left without satisfying answers for life's deepest questions. **Failing to recognize God's active power and presence through His Spirit leaves us to interpret life and face eternity on our own.**

God did not leave us without help. **God's own Spirit was active in the past and continues His unstoppable work today.** If you are a believer, how often do you stop and ponder God's amazing gift of His Spirit? Those who trust Christ for salvation intimately experience the Holy Spirit's power. The Holy Spirit softens our stony hearts so that we love God more than we love ourselves.[16] He makes God's pleasure more important than our own. We learn to welcome the Holy Spirit's conviction of sin and depend on His moment-by-moment guidance. He is the source of the indescribable peace that radiates within us. How have you experienced the wonder of God's own Spirit poured out within you? Thank you, God, for your Holy Spirit!

Joel also described dreadful events likely still future to us in these verses. God's plans unfold exactly on His timetable. Joel foretold of wonders in the heavens before a great and dreadful day of the Lord. In keeping with His plan of redemption, God promised through Joel, "And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved."[17]

14: Spirit at creation: Genesis 1:2
15: God's Spirit in God's people: Judges 3:10; 1 Samuel 16:13; Ezekiel 11:5; Micah 3:8; Romans 8:9-17; Galatians 5:16-25; 2 Peter 1:21
16: Stony hearts transformed: Ezekiel 36:26-27
17: Calling on the Lord: Acts 2:21

God's Judgment – 3:1-16

Joel looked even further into the future as he foretold a future day when representatives from all nations will gather to make war against God's people in the "Valley of Jehoshaphat." The name "Jehoshaphat" probably does not relate to the former king of Judah, but to the name's meaning, "the Lord judges." The nations of the world will think they are gathering to destroy Israel, but in reality, God is gathering them for judgment. **God will judge the nations and fully restore Israel as His people.**

God's justice will prevail as He exposes and judges individuals and nations who perpetuate evil. Though God would use Assyria and Babylon to discipline Israel and Judah, He would judge the foreign nations for their cruelty against His people. Joel reversed Isaiah's famous lines about beating swords into plowshares.[18] God commanded that warriors assemble and the weak declare their strength. Joel's words, "Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe," reappear in Revelation.[19] This imagery points to God's action as He brings judgment on the sin of mankind.

Where is the hope in this apocalyptic scene? Verse 16 presents God as the stronghold for His people, even as He judges those who have rejected Him. **By His grace, believers find refuge from God's judgment in God Himself.**

God's People – 3:17-21

Joel describes the spiritual and physical restoration of Israel. The land formerly ravaged by locusts will be graciously replenished. **The Lord's presence and protection will make Jerusalem and Zion flourish as a scene of indescribable beauty.**

Through Joel, God warned of judgment and offered hope. The gospel message echoes this theme as God's offer of salvation through His Son brings hope despite the reality of sin and judgment. **Those who find refuge in God are eternally safe – protected by the Lord.**

Obadiah's Prophecy of Edom's Judgment – Obadiah 1

Judgment on Edom – 1-14

The prophetic book of Obadiah specifically addressed the nation of Edom. **Esau's descendants, or the nation of Edom, was considered a "near relative" of the Israelites.**[20] Strife characterized the relationship between the Israelites and the Edomites despite their connection. The initial contention between Isaac's twins, Esau and Jacob, set the course for the future of their descendants.[21] During Israel's exodus from Egypt, the Edomites refused to allow the Israelites to pass through their land.[22] Their unbrotherly behavior continued during Obadiah's time. They delighted and participated in cruelty to Judah as she fell to Babylon.

18: Swords into plowshares: Isaiah 2:4
19: God's judgment: Revelation 14:14-20
20: Esau: Genesis 32:3
21: Esau and Jacob: Genesis 25:23-34
22: Edomite refusal: Numbers 20:14-21

Who Was Obadiah?

- **The Prophet:** Obadiah means "Servant of Jehovah." His exact identity is difficult to determine among 13 men named Obadiah in the Old Testament.
- **The Audience:** Edom, the nation that descended from Esau, most likely prior to the exile
- **The Message:** God's retribution on Edom for unbrotherliness and betrayal of Israel
- **The Image to Remember:** Lofty dwelling places

The name Edom means "red," an interesting connection with Esau, who was red-haired at birth and sold his birthright for a meal of red stew.[23] The nation of Edom bordered Moab and Judah along a high plateau of red mountains between the River Zered on the north and the Gulf of Aqaba on the south. Many fortresses dotted Edom's boundaries, sitting high like the eagle's nest referred to in Obadiah 1:4.

This short book presents a message of hope to Judah. The promise of God's judgment on their enemy nation and a promise of restoration consoled God's people.[24]

The Verdict – 1-9

The Sovereign Lord God Almighty declared His solemn judgment against Edom. **Pride rose as Edom's predominant sin.** Commonly referred to as a "root sin," pride leads to many other sins. Edom, though a relatively small nation, boasted of her achievements and impregnable fortresses. God promised to bring down this arrogant nation. Edom's downfall offers a needed warning in a world that often esteems pride as a virtue.

The Crimes – 10-14

God's identification with His people runs deep.[25] Rooted in God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3, when Edom offended God's people, the nation actually offended God Himself. When Jerusalem and Judah were stripped and helpless in the clutches of their enemy, Edom did not help their brother nation. Instead, Edom "stood aloof," rejoiced over Judah's distress, and participated in the plunder of God's people. **Edom's unbrotherliness against Judah did not escape God's attention.** Judgment awaited the proud nation of Edom.

Deliverance in Zion – 1:15-21

God's Judgment on All Nations – 15-16

God's judgment goes beyond Edom. **All people and all nations stand accountable to God.** Obadiah declared, "The day of the Lord is near for all nations." This statement points to God's

---

23: Esau: Genesis 25:25, 30
24: Edomite cruelty and judgment: Isaiah 34:5-15; 63:1-4; Jeremiah 49:17; Lamentations 4:21; Ezekiel 25:13-14; Amos 1:11-12
25: God and His people: Matthew 25:40, 45; Acts 9:4-5

final judgment, like many other Old Testament prophecies.[26] Judgment awaits all who have rebelled against God and delighted in the mistreatment of His people.

God's retribution for evil inflicted on those He loves brings comfort to believers. The reassurance God's people experience goes beyond a desire for evildoers to receive payback. In this life, circumstances make it seem like evil is winning and God is losing. This is not so! The fact that God's justice prevails over evil brings hope. Vengeance belongs to God, who dispenses perfect justice at the right time and in the right measure.

God's Salvation for His People – 17-21

God emphatically spoke through Obadiah of ultimate victory for His people. He would bring them home again to the promised land. "Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau." **God would deliver the lands of their enemies into Israel's hands.**

Obadiah's final sentence speaks of God's universal rule: "And the kingdom will be the LORD's." **God's rule and reign cannot be stopped by human oppressors, false gods, or spiritual opposition.** Though God would allow enemy nations to discipline His people, His promises to them remained steadfast.

The eternal King reigns without rival. No matter how things appear today, God's justice will prevail. As this world and its people move ever closer to final judgment, God calls people to find refuge and salvation in His Son. **God warns of coming judgment, but offers hope and restoration.** Through Joel and Obadiah, God moves His people to share urgently the reality of coming judgment and the good news of the gospel with others.

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Joel warned the outwardly prosperous people of Judah of imminent locust swarms that would strip the land bare. This tangible event offered a wake-up call as Joel cried out to people from all ranks of society to repent – to turn from sin and to God. With his somber message, Joel foretold "the day of the Lord" – a coming day of accountability to God. He also promised God would restore the devastated land and banished nation. God would pour out His Spirit on His beloved people. In a future day, God will gather all people and all nations to face the judgment due their sin. **Joel's message of certain judgment echoed with a call to find hope in God.** God's warnings represent the depth of His love and care for His people. God passionately longs for His people to return to Him – to find a place of vitality and fruitfulness.

Obadiah spoke of God's pending judgment to Edom, a brother nation who should have offered care and help to Israel. In pride and arrogance, Esau's descendants mistreated the Israelites and rejoiced in Israel's pain. God never overlooks wrongs done to His people. **Obadiah declared that the proud nation of Edom would crumble while Israel would prevail.** Obadiah's message offered hope to God's people. God's justice cannot be thwarted by evil individuals and enemy nations.

26: Final judgment foretold: Isaiah 66:18; Joel 3:1-2; Haggai 2:6-7; Zechariah 9:8

Apply It

Joel urged the nation of Judah to hear God's voice through the devastating locust swarms that devoured their land and livelihood. **While we may struggle to understand God's hand and plan in modern-day catastrophes, every troubling situation offers an opportunity to turn to God.** Difficult times lower our defenses and prove our lack of control over life's circumstances. Distressing situations can harden us if we blame God, but can bring incredible growth and transformation when we humbly turn to Him. God can use every calamity you face to accomplish His purposes. How is God reaching you through the most difficult thing you face today? When will you pause and listen for His voice?

If we do not yield to God's transformative work woven into life's agonizing moments, we are left with only jagged scars and painful memories. Suffering is wasted when we fail to surrender to God. There is another way. **Our creative and powerful God uses even the consequences of personal sin for our good and His glory.** God loves to restore the years the locusts have eaten. How have you experienced God's restorative power in your life? If your story includes wasted opportunities or years of spiritual complacency, will you turn to God right now?

God judged the nation of Edom for inflicting harm on the Israelites. Similarly, God calls believers to family loyalty within the body of Christ. **This world's socially acceptable combative posture tempts believers to turn on one another when God has commanded us to love each other genuinely and patiently.**[27] While it seems socially acceptable to publicly vilify another Christian, Scripture exhorts us to uphold unity and speak directly to those with whom we disagree. God's Spirit will give us wisdom to humbly uphold truth and maintain unity. Is God leading you to make amends with someone you failed to honor and protect? What will you do?

Joel called the people of Judah to recognize God's judgment and repent. Obadiah announced God's verdict against Edom. Across the ages, people have zealously suppressed any sense of personal accountability to God. Ignoring God's grace expressed in every sunrise and drop of rain, people attempt to live independent of God and rule their own lives. This delusion will be shattered, if not in this life, in eternity. **Every nation and every person stand guilty before God.** In mercy, God sent His Son to bear the just penalty of sin for everyone who puts their faith in His sacrifice on their behalf. How does the reality of individual accountability before God impact your life? With whom would God have you share both this reality of judgment and also the gospel message of hope and salvation?

27: Christian love: Matthew 22:36-40; John 13:34-35; 1 John 4:7-14

All Scripture quotations in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ® NIV ®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Hosea – God's Redemptive Love

Hosea

Lesson Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 14 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What was the most transformative truth you heard in the lecture? How did God lead you to respond to that truth?

2. As you processed the notes, how did the parallel certainties of God's judgment alongside His hope of salvation challenge you personally?

Second Day: Read Hosea 1:1–2:13.

God called Hosea to begin his ministry and marry Gomer.

3. What command did God present to Hosea? How did Hosea respond?

© BSF 2022 (This material may be downloaded from mybsf.org and used by BSF class members in connection with their personal BSF class studies. It may not be otherwise reproduced without BSF's written permission.)

4. a. List the names God assigned to Gomer's children, and describe how their meanings apply to Israel.

   b. Describe the specific ways God promised to restore Israel in verses 1:10–2:1.

5. From verses 2:2-13, name specific consequences Gomer and Israel would suffer.

Third Day: Read Hosea 2:14–3:5.

God deliberately pursued Israel and directed Hosea regarding Gomer.

6. a. List words and phrases from verses 2:14-23 that describe God's intentional pursuit and compassionate heart toward wayward Israel.

   b. In what specific ways has God demonstrated His unconditional love for you and His Church?

7. What did God command Hosea to do, and how might obeying God have impacted him?

8. a. List Hosea's actions and the conditions he established for Gomer in response to God's command.

   b. How does Hosea's response picture God's redemptive love for you and His people?

Fourth Day: Read Hosea 4–13.

Hosea exposed Israel's sins and failure to repent.

9. a. List Israel's specific sins and their resulting consequences.

   4:1-3

   5:4-6

   7:11-16

   8:1-5

   10:1-2

   13:2-3

   b. How has God used sin's natural consequences to draw you to Himself?

10. a. What do the following verses reveal about Israel's rebellion and God's mercy?

    6:6

    7:13

    9:10

    13:4

    b. Give phrases from Hosea 11 that express God's deep yearning for His people.

    c. How does God's holiness, mercy, and heart for His people affect you personally?

11. In what situations today might God's punishment offer a warning or express His great love?

Fifth Day: Read Hosea 14.

God promised redemption in response to repentance.

12. What actions of repentance did God command Israel to take, and what did God promise in return?

13. How did God describe Israel's restoration?

14. a. What do you learn from Hosea's exhortation in verse 9?

    b. How will you purposefully walk in the ways of the Lord and bask in His redeeming love?

Sixth Day: Review Hosea.

God relentlessly pursues wayward people.

15. How does Hosea's experience help you realize ways you wander from God?

16. What did you learn about God's response to waywardness that encouraged you?

Passage Discovery (homiletics, word study, etc.) for Group and Administrative Leaders: Hosea

Lecture Notes

Next step: Read Lesson Notes.

Lesson Notes

Hosea

Focus Verse

"I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them."
– Hosea 14:4

Outline

- Hosea's Wayward Wife – Hosea 1–3
- God's Wayward People – Hosea 4–14

Engage

Betrayal inflicts a uniquely sharp and painful wound. A sadly common experience, betrayal takes on many forms in this life. Abandoned friendships, shattered family relationships, and manipulative workplace dynamics often involve betrayal. Perhaps the heartbreaking experience of adultery within marriage represents the most intimate betrayal of all. The forsaken spouse faces crippling grief and deep anger, and they long for a safe place to flee. God used this all-too-familiar pain to illustrate His relationship with His covenant people, Israel.

The prophet Hosea remained faithful as he faced the agonizing pain inflicted by his adulterous wife, Gomer. Like Hosea, God is no stranger to betrayal. The Israelites repeatedly turned from God to idols, though He loved and chose them as His own people. Jesus experienced betrayal by His disciple Judas. Sadly, we are much like the Israelites and Hosea's unfaithful wife – prone to wander into sin. Times of grief, turmoil, or temptation can cause our eyes and hearts to turn away from God. Yet God remains faithful despite our waywardness. **God relentlessly pursues wayward people.** He stubbornly holds fast to His children — always seeking to bring them back to Himself.

Who Was Hosea?

- **The Prophet:** Little is known about Hosea, whose name means "salvation." At God's command, Hosea entered a marriage that brought great suffering. He offered prophetic words and personal experience that illustrated God's message to Israel.
- **The Audience:** Hosea was the last prophet to speak to the northern kingdom of Israel before her fall to Assyria – approximately 775-720 B.C., during much of the reign of Jeroboam II.
- **The Message:** God's faithfulness to wayward Israel
- **The Image to Remember:** An adulterous spouse

Hosea's Wayward Wife – Hosea 1-3

Hosea's prophetic ministry overlapped with the prophet Amos. During this time, Israel descended deeply into political corruption, moral decay, and revolting idol worship. Israel betrayed the God who chose them as His own people and led them faithfully. Hosea's suffering with his adulterous wife led him straight into the arms of God, who understood the depth of his pain. **Hosea's human experience presents a vivid picture of God's intimate love, tender heart, and redemptive plan for His people.**

The Way of Sin – 1:1–2:1

God Commands Hosea to Marry – 1:1-2

Hosea primarily addressed the northern kingdom of Israel, but also spoke God's warning to Judah. **Hosea's ministry began with God's shocking command to marry and have children with a promiscuous wife, Gomer.** Opinions vary regarding Gomer's purity on her wedding day, though the Hebrew text could indicate her unfaithfulness predictively. Gomer's betrayal of Hosea parallels Israel's abandonment of God and His ways.

Hosea obeyed God's strange instructions, submitting himself to a life of grief and pain. God does not promise an easy path for those who follow His will. Nonetheless, God remains ever present with us in our suffering, which never surprises Him.[1]

God Names Hosea's Children – 1:3-9

God assigned the names of Gomer's three children with prophetic significance. Gomer conceived and gave birth to Hosea's son following their marriage. God instructed Hosea to name the boy Jezreel, which means "God scatters." This name points back to the horrific massacre by Jehu at Jezreel. As prophesied, God shattered Jehu's house when his dynasty in Israel ended with Zechariah.[2] The prophetic name also points forward, as God would soon break the power of the kingdom of Israel and send His people into exile.

Gomer's unfaithfulness leaves the paternity of her next two children in question. The passage does not specifically name Hosea as their father.[3] The names of Gomer's next two children revealed Israel's current relationship with God and provided a call to repentance. Gomer's second child was a girl. God told Hosea to call her Lo-Ruhamah, which means "not loved." God would no longer show love to Israel, who left Him for other gods. Gomer's betrayal of Hosea parallels Israel's abandonment of God and His ways. God's strong statement pointed to His coming discipline on His people. However, God promised to continue to show love to Judah saying, "I will save them."

Gomer gave birth to another son named Lo-Ammi, which means "not my people." This name signified that God no longer knew Israel as His people because they no longer knew Him as their God. **Wayward Israel deserted God just as Gomer cast aside Hosea.** Such shocking words should have brought Israel and her people to their knees in repentance.

1: God – our refuge and help: Psalm 46:1-2
2: Jehu's dynasty ends: 2 Kings 9:7–10:30; 2 Kings 15:10-12
3: Children of adultery: Hosea 2:4.

God Offers Redeeming Hope – 1:10–2:1

God delivered a message of restoration and hope for Israel's future that stands in striking contrast to the prophetic message He incorporated in the names of Hosea's children. **God's great faithfulness shines forth as He recalls His repeated promise to restore and multiply Israel like the immeasurable sand on the seashore.**[4] God will again call Israel the "children of the living God," even though He had declared them as "not my people."

In amazing grace and redeeming love, God continues to welcome undeserving sinners in ways that defy our imagination. Hosea wrote, "... great will be the day of Jezreel." The place formerly known for horror and punishment[5] will one day become the place where Israel and Judah unite as one nation under one king. God always accomplishes His purposes, overruling what people intend for harm.[6] **With God, the abandoned become His people, and the unloved find security in His unshakeable love.**

The Wages of Sin – 2:2-23

Sin's Barrenness – 2:2-5

In a burst of poetry, Hosea revealed the stark reality experienced by those who abandon God. **Hosea's astonishingly descriptive words described the excruciating pain experienced by a forsaken spouse.** "Rebuke your mother, rebuke her, for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband. Let her remove the adulterous look from her face and the unfaithfulness from between her breasts." Sin's piercing consequences fell on Gomer, who found herself stripped naked, parched, and thirsty. Her unrelenting sin also brought suffering to her children. Hosea refused to extend his love to these children conceived in disgrace.

Hosea's appalling story mirrors God's story. Israel turned away from God and suffered deserved punishment. God's intimate love for His people elevates the painful reality of unfaithfulness to Him. God knows the number of hairs on our heads. He knit us together in our mother's womb.[7] However easily we can criticize Israel and Gomer, reflecting on the waywardness in our own hearts seems wiser. Like Gomer and Israel, we are also prone to wander from God. Our sin also brings consequences, even as we experience God's mercy.[8] **Unfaithfulness to God ignores His grace and ultimately leads to emptiness, barrenness, and pain.**

Sin's Futility – 2:6-8

God relentlessly pursues sinners to change their course and move them toward repentance. **Gomer not only gave herself to adulterous relationships with men but she also prostituted herself to other gods.** She foolishly offered Hosea's lavish gifts and provisions in Baal worship. Gomer's futile pursuit of sin resulted in God walling her in – blocking her path with thornbushes. The fulfillment she chased with her lovers escaped her. Gomer's pursuit of sin left her hollow and empty-handed with nowhere to turn, another reflection of Israel's peril.

4: God's promise to Abraham: Genesis 22:17; 32:12
5: Jezreel, Jezebel, and Ahab: 2 Kings 9:10, 30-37; 10:6-11
6: God overrules: Genesis 50:20
7: God's intimate love: Psalm 139:13-16; Matthew 10:30; Luke 12:7
8: Sin's ultimate consequence: Romans 6:23

Gomer would realize her desperation and confess her desire to return to her husband, but not actually do so. Why? Sin's fierce grip entraps and blinds people in confounding ways. **Despite her profession, Gomer refused to give up her sin, repent, and return to her husband.** She continued to reject Hosea, failing to recognize him as her generous provider. In the very same way, Israel failed to acknowledge God as their provider. The nation committed the same sins of adultery and prostitution against God by worshiping other gods. Sin's bitter consequences await those who reject God.

Sin's Ruin – 2:9-13

Sin brings barrenness and futility and leads to ruin. Gomer's punishment foreshadows Israel's judgment. God took away Gomer's ripened grain and new wine along with the wool and linen intended to cover her naked body. The lewdness her lovers perceived led them to reject her. Gomer's celebrations ceased as she suffered the desolation and ruin of sin. She found herself alone and rejected. Her fig trees and vines turned into a thicket devoured by wild animals. **Sin never delivers what it promises.**

Sin's Remedy – 2:14-23

God seeks to restore broken people caught in their sin. God shined hope into Israel's desperate situation as Hosea's prophecy turned to Israel. **God promised to speak tenderly to Israel, lead her into the wilderness, and restore her purity as His people.** Israel would again turn to God and call Him "my husband," and Baal's name would be removed from her lips. Israel would find herself forever betrothed to God, whose redeeming love gleams forth. Restored in the land, Israel would experience God's unconditional love as He declares, "You are my people." These promises highlight the compassion, righteousness, justice, and faithfulness of God. God alone so loves His people and provides a needed remedy for their sin.

The Way of Redemption – 3

Redeeming Love Illustrated – 3:1

God commanded Hosea to do the unthinkable – seek and show love to his straying wife, despite the humiliating betrayal he had suffered. Hosea was to love adulterous Gomer as God loves the Israelites. Hosea pictures God's love for wayward Israel and wayward people today. Hosea's marriage and redemption of Gomer represents God's intimate relationship with Israel and His people throughout time.

Redeeming Love Applied – 3:2-5

Hosea obeyed God's command. He found Gomer on an auction block for slaves and bought her back for 15 shekels of silver along with nearly a bushel and a half of barley. **Hosea invited Gomer to forsake her adulterous ways and live properly as his wife.** With tender mercy, Hosea pledged his own faithfulness to Gomer. In this amazing expression of redemptive love, Hosea restored Gomer as his wife.

God's Hope for the Wayward

The Doctrine of Redemption

Gomer's descent into adultery landed her on a slave's auction block. In a shocking example of unconditional love, God sent Hosea to buy her back. This stunning picture beautifully depicts God's redeeming love. **Like Gomer, God's redeemed were once helplessly held captive by sin.** On their own, wayward sinners bear the weight of their guilt and shame and cannot escape sin's eternal consequence – death.

God's faithful love offers hope to sinners. **God sent His Son to fully pay the purchase price to redeem and rescue desperate people.** Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God, paid for sin with His precious blood.[9] Through faith in Christ, God delivers believers from a wasted life and into a glorious eternity. Jesus, our Redeemer, deserves resounding thanks, praise, devotion, and honor for His sacrifice on behalf of the undeserving.

We are more like Gomer than we care to admit. **Sin's wanderlust leads us away from the only true source of soul satisfaction – intimate fellowship with God.** When we fail to understand our need for redemption, we wrongly overestimate our own goodness. We can characterize our sin as merely wrong choices or bad decisions, rather than rebellion against God. We foolishly choose lesser loves that can never truly meet our deepest needs. In rebellion and pride, we commit spiritual adultery against our Creator, who loves and seeks us as His own. We are sinners in need of the Savior.

Do you recognize both your persistent waywardness *and* God's relentless pursuit of your heart? God loves you too much to let you wander into desolation and emptiness. In boundless love and at the cost of His own Son, God invites you to find life and hope in Christ. God loves you in the greatest possible way. Those who believe that Jesus suffered, died, and rose again on their behalf experience undeserved redemption and overwhelming joy. **God rescues us from our "Gomerness" because Jesus paid the price to buy us back from sin's bondage.** Job 19:25 says, "I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth." God enables us to live a redeemed life now and anticipate the day when we will see our Redeemer face-to-face!

Like Gomer, Israel's adultery against God would leave her desolate and facing harsh punishment. Their familiar sources of security would disappear and leave them empty. After a time of suffering, God promised to redeem Israel, who would return and seek Him. This painful discipline would break their willfulness as they would come trembling to the Lord and receive His blessings. God's heart to redeem wayward sinners reaches to all people throughout time. God sent His Son to pay the purchase price for sin.[10] Only in Jesus can wandering sinners find hope.

9: Jesus, the Lamb of God: John 1:29; 1 Peter 1:18-19; Revelation 5:6
10: Christ redeems: 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13-14; Ephesians 1:7

God's Wayward People – Hosea 4–14

The remaining portion of Hosea's message took a prophetic turn. His appeal to Israel, the kingdom he sometimes calls "Ephraim," is poured out in emotions of righteous indignation and sorrow. Hosea proclaimed God's warnings and promises for Israel – His wayward people. **These words also ring true for God's wandering people today.**

Israel's Sins Against God – 4–5

God's Charges – 4

Hosea exposed Israel's sins, saying, "There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgement of God in the land." **Godlessness had deeply taken root throughout Israel.** The unfaithful people accepted cursing, lying, murder, stealing, and adultery into their daily lives. God's chosen people and promised land failed to flourish as God intended.

Lost in rebellious refusal to acknowledge God, Israel forgot Him. Instead of feeding from God's abundance, the entire nation was corrupted by sin's poison. Even the priests ignored God's law and participated in the sins of the people. **Israel deserted God, and a spirit of prostitution held them captive.** This state of decay and idol worship throughout Israel could only lead to God's judgment.

God's Judgment – 5

Sin is an affront to the holiness of God.[11] Hosea promised that God's purposeful judgment would fall upon Israel. God cares more about drawing His people back to Himself than their personal comfort. He will do whatever is necessary to deliver His people from their sinful ways. However, God does not force people into obedience like puppets. Israel chose to remain in sin and thus also chose sin's bitter consequences. **In love, God promised Israel's judgment as a means to restore her unto Himself.**

On God's behalf, Hosea cried out to Israel. Misery awaited Israel's steadfastly rebellious people. Fields would be laid waste, and battles would devour the land and people. Judah would also experience God's wrath and be carried off as if by a great lion, without hope of rescue. God would remain silent while Israel suffered – but not forever. **God sought to lead His people to earnestly seek Him as they experienced the misery of His promised judgment.**

God's Heart for Israel – 6–13

Israel's Unrepentant Response – 6–7

Israel paid lip service to repentance saying, "Come, let us return to the Lord." However, the unfolding text reveals little sincerity behind their words. Hosea equated their love to "a morning mist" that quickly disappears. Rather than insincere burnt offerings, God desired humble, heartfelt worship

---

11: Sin separates: Isaiah 59:1-2

that truly acknowledged Him.[12] Instead, the people persisted in disobedience and remained defiled. **Israel broke her covenant with God and continued in rebellious unfaithfulness.**

God's cry of woe and promises of destruction rose among those He so longed to redeem. He longed to redeem Israel, even in the depths of their abominable sin. However, the Israelites dug in their heels and remained in abhorrent sin. Their own arrogance testified against them. **Israel continued to call upon false gods and repeatedly turned away from God**. As a result, they would fall by the sword and be ridiculed in Egypt. Sin extracts a painful price.

Israel's Future Consequences – 8–13

Every futile pursuit of worldly gain and sinful idolatry would reap only ruin for Israel. They turned their backs on God, broke His covenant, and rebelled against His law. Israel sowed the wind and would reap the whirlwind that scattered their wealth, beautiful buildings, and even the people. Nothing would be left – no king, no crops, no sacrifices, and no festivals.

The nation that once refreshed God like fresh grapes in the desert or early fruit on a fig tree became vile and repulsive to Him. **The adulterous people used the silver and gold God provided to fashion idols for their false gods.** Human tendency to squander God's blessings and make idols of His gracious provisions continues today. This remains vile in God's sight.

God would drive the people who spurned His love out of His house and eventually out of His land. Thorns and thistles would cover their idolatrous altars as their high places were destroyed. **With sin's deceptive glory uncovered, the reality of sin's ruin overtook Israel.** Hosea pled with Israel to sow righteousness: "… it is time to seek the Lord, until He comes and showers His righteousness on you." Israel, in turn, rebelliously planted wickedness, reaped evil, ate the fruit of deception, and depended on her own strength.

Because of His great love, God lamented the just consequences of Israel's waywardness. With kindness and the bonds of faithful love, God had led Israel, which remained rebellious throughout its history. While God could not exalt them, He cried out "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel?" In compassion and love, God promised not to carry out the full extent of His fierce anger or to completely destroy Israel. He declared Himself as their Lord and God. Even as God leveled His solemn charges of guilt and prepared to send them into captivity, He beckoned Israel to return to Him. God is a deliverer who longs to rescue people caught in sin's trap.[13]

God's Plan for Israel's Restoration – 14

Israel's Call to Repentance – 14:1-3

Before Hosea closed his record of God's certain promises of coming judgment, he begged Israel to verbally confess their sins to the Lord. Sinful people need to openly name their specific sins against God, who faithfully forgives.[14] Israel needed to cease their blasphemous idol worship. Hosea

---

12: Obedience, not sacrifice: 1 Samuel 15:22
13: God, our Deliverer: 2 Samuel 22:2-3; Psalm 18
14: Confess sins: 1 John 1:9

called upon his nation to humbly and openly admit that God, not Assyria, would save them. Only in God can the fatherless find compassion.

Israel's Ultimate Redemption – 14:4-9

Ultimately, God alone can redeem sinners. He passionately desires to heal His people of their waywardness and love them freely. If God's people would return to Him, He promised to turn away His anger and to revive and restore them. Israel once again would flourish and blossom in God's shade. As they turned from idols, God would allow them to experience the fruitfulness only He can bring. He wants His people to walk in His ways. **God relentlessly pursues wayward people.** He longs to bring people to Himself so that they might experience the eternal fruit of righteousness and share His heart to pursue people caught in sin's trap.

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Hosea personally and painfully lived out God's prophetic message in his own life and home. His piercing and even shocking message also resonates with hope. **God so intimately relates to humanity that He equates human waywardness with the sin of adultery.** Scripture often offers marriage as a picture of how God relates to us. Paul speaks of the Church as Christ's beloved bride – set apart to be faithful to Him.[15] At the height of Israel's spiritual betrayal, God commanded Hosea to marry Gomer, a woman who would be unfaithful to him in every sense of the word. Gomer's flagrant adultery represented Israel's betrayal of God. Like Gomer, Israel fashioned idols out of the very silver and gold that God provided. Israel's heinous sin and abandonment of God led her on a destructive path toward captivity.

God never contentedly leaves His people caught in sin's grasp. Hosea's marriage to Gomer ultimately revealed God's redemptive purposes. Hosea purchased Gomer back from her life of sin and restored her as his wife. Similarly, Israel sunk deeply into sin and deserved brutal judgment. God came to their rescue first through punishment then through the promise to reconcile them to Himself. **We glimpse ourselves in Gomer's and Israel's sinful ways – ever wandering and seeking what seems alluring when viewed through the limited human lens of sin.** God views us through His perfect eyes of grace. He seeks and finds us in our undeserving state. He pursues us to bring us out of our sin. He restores us to Himself. How has God relentlessly pursued and met you when you have strayed from Him?

Apply It

Sin offers an appealing invitation that hides its insidious trap. Seeking pleasure, having fun, and making our own decisions seem good. However, sin does not come with a warning label that lists the dangers and pain of its forbidden fruit. Satan rarely tempts us with something that appears glaringly wrong. Usually, sin progressively lures us into a deeper pursuit of an ever-greater thrill or compromise

---

15: Christ's bride: Ephesians 5:25-33

without an awareness of the increasing cost. Israel and Gomer made a series of compromises that led the very people who had experienced God's special favor to expect His judgment. What deliberate sin has cost you much more than you expected? Will you ask God to open your eyes to the price of your spiritual complacency or the sin you ignore or excuse? God longs to deliver you from sin's snare and spare you unnecessary pain. He has something so much better for you. God does not withhold the best things from us. May we love God so passionately that nothing appeals to us that displeases Him.

The painful path God commanded for Hosea can be difficult to reconcile. Why would God lead His faithful servant to such a brutal life? Hosea's personal story paints an unforgettable picture in vibrant colors as the ugliness of rejecting God and the cost of redemptive love emerge. Hosea's suffering contributed to the greater good God intended. **Like Hosea, our relationships, marriages, and daily lives present the laboratory in which God accomplishes His deeper work in us.** How can you seek God's greater good in the most painful thing you are currently experiencing? Will you trust God if you never understand His purpose in the suffering He has allowed in your life? When we surrender to God, He redeems our pain to His glory.

Only when we recognize our sin as an abomination to God can we fully grasp what Jesus suffered on our behalf. Sinless Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God, bore sin's filth and shame when He stretched out His arms on the cross. When you trust Him for salvation, He removes your sin from you – as far as the east is from the west for all eternity.[16] Jesus' generous sacrifice deserves our loyal love every minute of every day. Sadly, like Gomer, we stray from the One who has so loved us to pursue empty and flimsy substitutes. We can easily excuse sin, preferring passing pleasure over the enduring delight of knowing and honoring God. What sin currently or regularly comes between you and God? God longs for your repentance. Will you trust God to redeem and restore what sin has destroyed? What words will you bring to God as you seek His forgiveness?

16: Sin removed: Psalm 103:12

All Scripture quotations in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ® NIV ®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Israel's Exile and Judah's Reforms

2 Kings 15–20; 2 Chronicles 26–32

Lesson Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 15 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the notes help you better understand and apply the spiritual lessons woven into Hosea's experience?

2. From the lecture, what stood out concerning God's love and His relentless pursuit of you?

Second Day: Read 2 Kings 15:8-31; 17.

Israel's idol worship resulted in God's judgment.

3. a. List the succession of kings who ruled Israel and the length of their reigns.

© BSF 2022 (This material may be downloaded from mybsf.org and used by BSF class members in connection with their personal BSF class studies. It may not be otherwise reproduced without BSF's written permission.)

b. Give a general description of the life in Israel under these kings.

4. How did Assyria gradually rise as a threat to Israel? What was the final result?

5. a. From 17:7-23, what was the true source of Israel's troubles?

b. How might a country, group of people, or individuals suffer when they turn away from God?

c. In what ways are you tempted to look somewhere besides God for what only He can give you?

Third Day: Read 2 Kings 15:1-7, 32-38; 16; 2 Chronicles 26–28.

Judah's kings tolerated and indulged in idolatry.

6. Summarize how idol worship infiltrated Judah.

7. a. From 2 Kings 16 and 2 Chronicles 28, record the acts committed by Ahaz that directly violated God's standards for His people.

b. How have you experienced or witnessed the escalating cost and damage of compromise and sin?

8. How do God's people find hope when current events and societal trends directly oppose God? If you can, find a strengthening Scripture to share with your group.

Fourth Day: Read 2 Kings 18:1-8; 2 Chronicles 29–31.

Hezekiah brought needed spiritual reforms to Judah.

9. a. What was Hezekiah's first action as king, and why was this necessary?

   b. In what way might you apply this action to your own walk with the Lord?

10. How did Hezekiah lead Judah to restore God-honoring worship:

    Regarding the role and activity of the priests?

    Calling the people back to God?

11. a. In what ways does honor for God and worship of Him require both corrective measures and proactive positive investment?

    b. How is God speaking to you about corrective and proactive actions to take in your own life?

Fifth Day: Read 2 Kings 18:9–20:21; 2 Chronicles 32.

Challenging circumstances tested Hezekiah's faith in God.

12. What threats did Hezekiah face during his reign?

13. How does Hezekiah's reign reveal human weakness as well as his overall pattern of seeking God?

14. a. Consider Hezekiah's prayer recorded in 2 Kings 19:14-19 and Isaiah 37:14-20. How do you see:

    His dependence on God?

    His deliberate focus on God Himself as his source of help?

    His honest statement of his predicament?

    His straightforward request?

    b. How did God answer Hezekiah's prayer?

    c. How was the prophet Isaiah involved with Hezekiah (see 2 Kings 19:20-34; 20:1-11, 14-19; 2 Chronicles 32:20 and skim Isaiah 36–39)?

    d. Think of the most troubling situation you face today. Write a prayer to the Lord that follows this pattern.

Sixth Day: Review 2 Kings 15–20; 2 Chronicles 26–32.

God alone deserves our wholehearted worship.

15. How do the lessons learned from Israel and Judah challenge you to seek wholehearted devotion to God?

Passage Discovery (homiletics, word study, etc.) for Group and Administrative Leaders: 2 Chronicles 26–32

Lecture Notes

Next step: Read Lesson Notes.

Lesson Notes

2 Kings 15–20; 2 Chronicles 26–32

Focus Verse

"... for the LORD your God is gracious and compassionate. He will not turn his face from you if you return to him." – 2 Chronicles 30:9b

Outline

- The Final Chapter of the Northern Kingdom of Israel – 2 Kings 15:8-31; 17
- God's Faithfulness to the Southern Kingdom of Judah – 2 Kings 15:1-7, 32-38; 16; 18–20; 2 Chronicles 26–32

Engage

What do you want people to most remember about you? The northern kingdom of Israel had many kings whose headstone should have read "and he did evil in the sight of the LORD." King after king failed to eradicate idol worship and lead the people to serve the one true God. **What we do exposes who or what we worship.** What we love most reveals the idols of our hearts. God deserves our undivided devotion and exclusive worship. Only He can save us. True obedience to God rises from a heart that loves and trusts Him and responds to His lavish grace.

Captivity and exile loomed near for both Israel and Judah. Israel's final kings contributed to spiritual decline that culminated in their capture by Assyria. Meanwhile in Judah, while several kings indulged idolatry, Hezekiah rose to shine as a beacon of light into the darkness. With sovereign purpose and corrective love, God kept His promises to sustain the faithful remnant and judge the rebellious majority. **God alone deserves our wholehearted worship.** Trusting and obeying God offer life's highest calling and greatest blessing. Turning away from God brings devastating consequences.

The Final Chapter of the Northern Kingdom of Israel – 2 Kings 15:8-31; 17

Jeroboam rose as Israel's first king when the nation divided into two kingdoms, Israel and Judah.[1] He established a destructive system of idol worship that eventually led to the demise of the northern kingdom.[2] Successive kings continued this flagrant offense against God. Despite God's warnings spoken through His prophets, the kings and people of Israel failed to live as God's covenant people. **Israel's refusal to respond to God's grace and to repent led to their eventual exile to Assyria.**

1: Divided kingdom: 1 Kings 12:20
2: Jeroboam's sin: 1 Kings 12:26-33

Rebellious Kings – 15:8-31; 17:1-6

A series of evil kings ruled in Israel following the physically prosperous but spiritually corrupt reign of Jeroboam II. **Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, and Pekah all followed the footsteps of their idolatrous predecessors.** Power-grabbing conspiracy, assassinations, brutal violence, and flagrant idolatry persisted during these dark years in Israel's history. God's judgment began to fall in Israel during Pekah's reign. The Assyrian king, Tiglath-Pileser, attacked and conquered several regions of Israel and took the inhabitants to Assyria as captives.

Hoshea attacked and assassinated Pekah to succeed him as king. **Assessed by Scripture as an evil king, Hoshea looked to foreign nations instead of trusting God to keep Israel safe.** When King Shalmaneser of Assyria forced Israel to pay a heavy annual tribute, Hoshea attempted to escape this burden by conspiring with Egypt. Ironically, this political scheming soon led Assyria to attack, capture, and imprison him. Three years later, Assyria took all of Israel into captivity.

Like Hoshea, we can fail to trust God and rest in His care. Even when God allows calamity or hardship, He can be trusted as the only source of true security. God uses situations that most challenge us to teach us about His grace and faithfulness. Ultimate peace cannot be achieved through political power, economic prosperity, or human solutions. **God wants His people to turn to Him for help.**[3]

God's Judgment – 17:7-23

Israel's demise did not result merely from the drama of world events and warring kingdoms. Rather, God orchestrated Israel's fall to Assyria as an act of divine judgment. **Israel fell and the people were deported because they had "sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up out of Egypt …."** God chose Israel to stand out as His covenant people and bring His light to the world. Instead, Israel sought other gods and chose to live like the ungodly nations around them. Their persistent wickedness aroused God's righteous anger.

In stiff-necked rebellion, Israel ignored God's clear commands and warnings. Their flagrant idolatry gravely offended God. They worshiped false gods, the heavenly bodies God created, and even participated in abominable human sacrifices. Prophet after prophet called Israel to repent and warned of God's judgment. God's Word always comes to pass. Consequently, exile from their homeland illustrated the fact that God had cast them away from His presence. **Rejecting God leads to separation from Him – the ultimate judgment.** Those who willingly choose personal autonomy instead of surrendering to God forfeit His favor, care, and protection.[4] When people say, "I want to go my own way," God lets them go – but that choice comes with consequences.

In compassion, God delays judgment to allow people time to repent and turn to Him.[5] However, God will not postpone His judgment forever. People often live their earthly days with little thought of accountability to God. However, the window of opportunity to turn to God in this life will close for all people at a time He determines. We should not exploit God's compassion by indulging our sin. Israel's history offers a dire warning to people of all times and ages. **Our time on earth should be invested in seeking the God who will be worshiped throughout eternity without rival.**[6]

3: God protects His people: Psalms 12; 20; 31:23; 91:4
4: Sin against God: Romans 1:18-20; 2:5-11; 3:9-18
5: God's patience: Psalm 86:15; 2 Peter 3:9.
6: Worshiping God for eternity: 2 Corinthians 6:16; Revelation 21:3

The Resettling of Samaria – 17:24-41

The Assyrian king sent people from many surrounding tribes and nations to inhabit the cities of Israel. God's sovereignty remained evident. As foreigners overtook the land, God sent lions to harass these people who did not worship Him. The Assyrian king shrewdly concluded that his people were dying because they did not worship the God of the land they now inhabited. In response, the king sent a captured Israelite priest to teach the foreigners God's law. The people learned about God and His laws, but simply added God to their list of deities to worship. This corrupt hybrid worship and eventual intermarriage with non-Jews established in Samaria led the Jewish people to despise the Samaritans.[7]

Centuries later, Jesus intentionally entered Samaria and called a pagan, immoral, outcast Samaritan woman to saving faith.[8] Those who reject God and His Son face judgment, while those who turn to Him receive grace and mercy. **Even though Assyria decimated the kingdom of Israel, deported the Israelites, and corrupted the land with false worship, God's redemptive plan prevailed.**

God's Faithfulness to the Southern Kingdom of Judah – 2 Kings 15:1-7, 32-38; 16; 18–20; 2 Chronicles 26–32

God faithfully upheld His promise to protect the lineage of David and bring His promised Messiah. After devastating judgment, the nation of Israel would emerge as a solitary dynasty through which God would send His own Son to redeem mankind. God's plans cannot be thwarted by human opposition.

The Rise of Idolatry Within Judah

The Mediocrity of Azariah and Jotham – 2 Kings 15:1-7, 32-38; 2 Chronicles 26–27

God blessed Azariah, also called Uzziah, with a successful 52-year reign because he "did what was right in the eyes of the LORD."[9] Azariah (Uzziah) experienced military success, fortified national security, and improved farming efforts throughout the land. However, serious spiritual compromise tarnished Azariah's reign. The people throughout Judah continued in idolatry because he did not remove the shrines of idol worship. The prophet Amos prophesied during Azariah's reign that God's judgment would come if Judah did not turn from idolatry and return to Him. **Azariah started strong, but pride led to his downfall.** He foolishly offered incense in the temple – a function designated exclusively to a priest. God punished Azariah with leprosy, and he never again entered God's temple.

Azariah's son Jotham followed his father's pattern. Although he obeyed God, he also neglected the removal of idolatrous shrines and failed to lead the people to worship the one true God. **God gave Jotham a much shorter reign of 16 years and began to set Syria and Israel against Judah to punish their idolatry.**

7: Disdain for Samaritans: John 4:9; 8:48
8: Jesus and the Samaritan woman: John 4:1-26
9: Uzziah: Isaiah 1:1; 6:1; Hosea 1:1; Amos 1:1; Zechariah 14:5; Matthew 1:8-9

Wholehearted commitment to God involves eradicating damaging compromises from daily life. While we often justify some allowances, failure to intentionally take action against sin brings consequences. Pride remains a constant threat as we enjoy God's gifts and blessings. **God lovingly disciplines His children to turn them from sin. God remains the only source of true success.** His love is our greatest blessing.

The Idolatry of Ahaz – 2 Kings 16; 2 Chronicles 28

Jotham's son Ahaz propelled Judah full steam into idolatry. Ahaz sacrificed his own children – an abomination in God's sight.[10] He led Judah in outright acts of idolatry that deliberately rejected God's presence and protection in favor of Assyria's false gods. In response, God subjected Judah to attacks by Syria and Israel. Ahaz did not repent or respond to God's discipline, despite experiencing alarming defeats in battle.

As he sought protection and favor from Assyria, Ahaz desecrated the temple and rejected God's presence. He offered the Assyrian king gold and silver from the temple and royal treasuries. He sought to impress this pagan king by redesigning God's temple to mimic Assyrian worship practices. Ahaz constructed a large new altar, moved the bronze altar, and sacrificed to Assyria's gods. He chose friendship with the world rather than commitment to God.[11]

God brought suffering upon Judah to provide an opportunity for her to repent and call on Him for help. Difficult circumstances often reveal whom and what we really trust. God's discipline flows from His love and desire for our best.[12] Regardless of the source of our difficulties, hard times allow us to recognize our lack of control and need to depend on God.

Hezekiah's Reign and Reforms – 2 Kings 18–20; 2 Chronicles 29–31

Hezekiah Reigned Faithfully – 2 Kings 18:1-8; 2 Chronicles 29:1-2

God raised the reign of King David as the standard for assessing kings. Hezekiah, Ahaz's son and successor, "did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father David had done." Hezekiah rejected idolatry and called Israel to rightly worship God. Though he made mistakes, Scripture evaluates Hezekiah as a faithful, righteous king. **God worked through Hezekiah to faithfully preserve the royal line of King David despite the dark cloud left hanging over Judah by Ahaz's reign.**

Hezekiah Restored Proper Worship – 2 Chronicles 29:3–31:21

The Physical Repair of the Temple – 2 Chronicles 29:3-36

The spiritual decline of the people led to the physical disrepair of God's anointed place of worship. **In the first month of his reign, Hezekiah prioritized the cleansing of the Jerusalem temple.** This purification process led the way for proper worship to be returned. Hezekiah ordered the defiled

---

10: Child sacrifices: Leviticus 20:2-5
11: Friendship with the world: James 4:4
12: God's loving discipline: Hebrews 12:5-11

Inadequate Substitutes for the One True God

The Doctrine of Idolatry

Christianity hinges on the exclusive worship of the one true God. Worship of anything else, whether nature, ideology, wealth, power, pleasure, or work, is called idolatry – a sin in God's eyes. Is God selfish to demand undivided worship? God's jealousy for our devotion rests on the fact that He alone is God and Creator.[13] **Worshiping anyone or anything other than God is a sin because only God deserves our worship.** The prophet Isaiah confronted the foolishness of worshiping idols as he described a man who cuts down a tree and uses some of the wood to make a fire to warm himself and bake bread. With other pieces of the same wood, he carves an idol and prays to it.[14] Powerless gods of our own making cannot save us or do us any good.

Idols include more than carved images. **The Bible teaches that we commit idolatry when we make anything other than God our source of security, safety, or provision.** God deserves nothing less than wholehearted, undivided allegiance. Sadly, sinful humans can turn almost anything, even God's blessings, into idols. People seek fulfillment in the approval of others, sex, money, power, prestige, technology, entertainment, and many other things – failing to see that only God provides ultimate peace and satisfaction.[15] God willingly and graciously saves us when we call on Him for salvation and worship Him alone.[16]

The first and greatest commandment declares, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."[17] **When our inner cravings lead us anywhere but to God, we fail to recognize the reality and danger of idolatry.** Loving anything more than God distorts our perspective on reality and misaligns our priorities.

On our own, we cannot love and worship God supremely. **God had to love us first to save us from our sins and then enable us to love Him in return.[18]** God's sacrifice of His own Son to save us perfectly illustrates His unfathomable love. Why would we worship anyone or anything else when God has loved us this way? The Holy Spirit enables us to love and worship God in spirit and truth.[19] God guides our wandering hearts to grow in wholehearted devotion to Him. What do you love and seek more than God Himself? Ask God to awaken a hunger in you that only He can satisfy. The right response to every joy, struggle, uncertainty, or loss we face in this life is to worship God. Nothing is more secure than God Himself. He deserves all our worship.

13: Worship only God: Exodus 20:3; Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Isaiah 44:6-8; 1 Corinthians 8:6; James 2:19
14: Foolishness of idols: Deuteronomy 4:28; Isaiah 44:9-20; Revelation 9:20
15: Cannot serve two masters: Matthew 6:24
16: Only God can save: Psalm 49:15; Isaiah 43:11; John 3:16; Acts 4:12; Hebrews 1:3
17: Greatest commandment: Matthew 22:37-38
18: God first loved us: 1 John 4:19
19: Spirit and truth: John 4:23-24

temple to be cleansed and mobilized the Levites to prepare and consecrate the temple and its furnishings to restore worship as God had prescribed.

Hezekiah made a covenant with God and reinstituted animal sacrifices. Musicians played as the people were called to bow in worship. So many sacrifices were offered that the priests could not keep up with the demand. Hezekiah and the people rejoiced at how quickly temple worship had been reestablished.

The Spiritual Renewal of the People – 2 Chronicles 30–31

Hezekiah also called people from Israel and Judah to gather and celebrate the Passover and Festival of Unleavened Bread as they had before. A letter from the king circulated throughout Israel and Judah calling God's people to "return to the LORD." The Passover celebration celebrated their Hebrew identity and commemorated their deliverance from Egyptian slavery by God's mighty hand.[20] When Israel and Judah strayed from God, they neglected their national festivals that God designed to consecrate and unify them as His people.

Celebration filled Jerusalem as the people sought God's forgiveness and turned their hearts to seek Him. Just as their idolatry led to sin and suffering, their obedience brought great joy. Hezekiah personally encouraged the Levites, who returned to fulfilling the roles God intended for them – leading His people in worship. As the people left Jerusalem to return to their towns, they smashed the remnants of idolatry on their way. Hezekiah led the people by offering a contribution from his own possessions as he called them to bring offerings to support Israel's temple and priests.

Scripture commends Hezekiah's practical and spiritual leadership as Judah's king. The people will again fail and turn from God. However, God blessed Hezekiah for his wholehearted work to uphold Israel's unique calling as God's people.

Hezekiah Rebelled Against Assyria – 2 Kings 18:9–20:21; 2 Chronicles 32

Hezekiah's Faith Was Tested – 2 Kings 18:9-37; 2 Chronicles 32:1

The northern kingdom of Israel fell to Assyria in the fourth year of Hezekiah's reign. Ten years later, Assyria launched attacks on Judah. **In fear, Hezekiah attempted to appease the Assyrian king by giving him gifts of silver and gold, even stripping the gold off the door and doorposts of the temple.**

Hezekiah Turned to God for Help – 2 Kings 19; 2 Chronicles 32:2-23

The Assyrian king Sennacherib sent Hezekiah a threatening letter, and the Assyrians continued to mock Hezekiah and the Lord in front of all the people. Judah's enemy intended to undermine Hezekiah's faith and leadership and control his nation. However, Hezekiah put his eyes on the Lord to find courage to rebel against Assyria. **Hezekiah confirmed his loyalty to God as the divine king over Judah.** He would serve God and God alone.

20: Passover: Exodus 12

What did Hezekiah do in the face of this ominous threat? The Assyrians were known for their cruel brutality. **First, Hezekiah sought God in prayer.** He acknowledged the real trauma he faced as he spread out Sennacherib's menacing letter before the Lord. His powerful prayer, recorded in both 2 Kings 19:14-19 and Isaiah 37:14-20, offers a beautiful example for us. Hezekiah set his eyes deliberately on God and recited truth about God's limitless power. He asked God to listen to Sennacherib's offensive ridicule and blasphemy. He acknowledged the cruelty of their enemy and the powerlessness of Assyria's false gods. Then, in a simple and direct request, he asked God to deliver them to show the world that He alone was God.

Secondly, Hezekiah received a message God sent through His prophet Isaiah. With God's authority behind his words, Isaiah foretold Sennacherib's defeat and Judah's victory.[21] Hezekiah took practical steps to fortify Jerusalem, including building a famous waterway. However, ultimately only God could provide Hezekiah and Judah with the security and victory they needed.

In answer to bold prayer and in a vibrant display of God's power, the "angel of the LORD" killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. Sennacherib and his troops returned to Assyria where Sennacherib was eventually killed by his own sons. God showed Himself as mighty, and God's people witnessed His power.

Hezekiah's Human Sinfulness Remained – 2 Kings 20; 2 Chronicles 32:24-33

The order of events in Hezekiah's story can be difficult to determine with certainty. Sometime around the time of the Assyrian threat, Hezekiah became gravely ill. The prophet Isaiah told him he was going to die. Once again, Hezekiah prayed. **God verified His promise to heal Hezekiah by giving a miraculous sign.** The sundial's shadow went back 10 steps – literally reversing the direction of the sun's normal movement. God added 15 years to his life. Despite this miracle, Hezekiah's heart became proud, and God's wrath fell on Jerusalem. When Hezekiah repented, God relieved the city of suffering.

Hezekiah was a great king, yet still a sinner. When a Babylonian envoy visited Jerusalem, Hezekiah showed off his wealth and boasted about his riches. He felt so secure that he hid nothing from the Babylonians. As a result, Isaiah told Hezekiah that all the wealth he had flaunted before the Babylonians would one day be theirs. Some of his descendants would be taken captive by Babylon. Despite Hezekiah's commitment to the Lord, he did not obey God perfectly.

God promised to send a Messiah from the tribe of Judah and the line of David. The people of Judah looked to each successive king seeking the promised One who would bring lasting peace. **Hezekiah's reforms brought blessing to Judah, but Hezekiah was not the promised Redeemer-King.**[22] He did not rule with perfect righteousness. His son and the people veered from the righteous reforms he instituted.

Israel's exile and Judah's slide into idolatry did not overrule God's master plan. Hezekiah's needed reforms did not bring deep enough transformation to prevent Judah from returning to idolatry and sin. As their exile approached, God's grace remained evident. The story of Israel and Judah warns of the peril of rejecting God and the amazing opportunity to turn to Him. **God alone deserves our wholehearted worship.** God alone reigns over heaven and earth.

21: Isaiah's prophecy: "Isaiah 37:21-35
22: The Messiah's perfect rule: Isaiah 9:7

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

God repeatedly warned Israel, graciously giving opportunities and time to turn from their sin. The idol worship instituted by Jeroboam persisted as Israel's last kings spiraled into deeper and deeper sin. Sin moves down a path that is increasingly destructive. **Just as God had promised, Assyria defeated Israel and took them into exile.** Even though God compassionately delayed His judgment, His promise stood firm.

Judah's kings failed to lead the people to worship God. This evil escalated as Ahaz led Judah into flagrant idolatry and cared more about the favor of other nations than pleasing God. His son and successor, Hezekiah, rose as a shining star in Judah's history. Hezekiah purified the temple, restored national worship, and resisted the Assyrian king Sennacherib. In times of distress, Hezekiah sought God and called on His unlimited power. As a result, God miraculously delivered Judah from Assyria. **By His sovereign will, God preserved the kingly lineage of David and a faithful remnant in Judah.** Though not a perfect king, Hezekiah led Judah well. God's promises cannot be broken.[23]

Apply It

God demonstrates His compassion not only by removing pain, but also by revealing sin. He calls us to repentance. He unmasks the powerlessness of the idols we trust more than Him. How serious it is to spurn God's grace and abuse His compassion! The next time God convicts you of a specific sin, how will you recognize His love, turn from that sin, and experience His deliverance? When God uses something unexpectedly hard to get your attention and reveal how much you need Him, what will you do to joyfully run to Him? When you are disappointed or disillusioned by something or someone, will you recognize that only God can give you what you need most? Lord, help us recognize the many ways you express your compassion to us and respond in a way that honors You!

The magnetic pull and downward spiral of sin should alarm us. We find it easy to excuse compromise, explain our divided loyalties, and ignore the threat posed by choices that seem inconsequential. We usually do not foresee sin's escalating damage when we take that first step away from God's best. **We can learn from Israel and Judah that sin never delivers what is promised.** God lovingly disciplines us to spare us greater pain and prove His faithfulness. Love for God and gratitude for Christ's sacrifice offer the supreme reason to seek and obey God. The Holy Spirit gives believers the power to overcome sin and obey God. When your eyes are on God, sin's appeal fades.

Crisis tested Hezekiah's trust in God. Hard times reveal what matters most to us. Hezekiah demonstrated his well-placed faith in God by seeking Him through prayer and listening to Isaiah, God's prophet. How do you respond in times of crisis? Do doubts overwhelm you, or does faith sustain you? God does not test our faith to learn something He does not already know. However, we benefit from experiencing God's sustaining power when we are rendered weak and helpless. We grow when we experience that what we believe about God remains steadfastly true. **Your current crisis is an opportunity to worship and glorify almighty God.**

23: God's enduring faithfulness: Psalm 117

Do you feel burdened by trying to obey God but always failing? Do His commands seem overwhelming? We cannot obey God perfectly. God praised Hezekiah, but we know his faith and obedience faltered. **God sent Jesus to lift the burden of obeying God's laws perfectly.** Jesus says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ... For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). When Jesus came, He perfectly fulfilled the laws God gave to Moses and freed us from earning His favor with our performance. Because of what Jesus did, when we put our faith in Him, God graciously turns away His judgment of our sin. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). God does not condemn us, but makes us His own children so we can walk in His ways.[24] We are great sinners, but we have a greater Savior!

24: No condemnation: Romans 8:1-4

All Scripture quotations in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ® NIV ®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Judah's Path Into Exile

2 Kings 21–25; 2 Chronicles 33–36

Lesson Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 16 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the notes help you process the downward spiral of Israel and Judah's sin and the reality of God's grace, even in judgment?

2. What truth from the lecture offered personal encouragement in your own battle with sin?

Second Day: Read 2 Kings 21; 2 Chronicles 33.

Idolatry led Judah into horrendous sin through the reigns of Manasseh and Amon.

3. a. Give specific examples of Manasseh's rebellion. How did his leadership impact the people of Judah?

© BSF 2022 (This material may be downloaded from mybsf.org and used by BSF class members in connection with their personal BSF class studies. It may not be otherwise reproduced without BSF's written permission.)

b. How did God demonstrate His faithfulness despite the nation's unfaithfulness?

4. a. What events led Manasseh to repentance? How did God respond to him?

b. In what ways has God intervened in your life to restore you to Himself or deepen your faith in Him?

5. What do you learn about the importance of godly leadership from the reigns of Manasseh and Amon?

Third Day: Read 2 Kings 22:1–23:20; 2 Chronicles 34.

Josiah's heart for God brought reformation and restoration to Judah.

6. a. Describe each of the important points of impact during Josiah's reign:
2 Chronicles 34:1-2

2 Chronicles 34:3a

2 Chronicles 34:3b-7

2 Chronicles 34:8

b. What key moments in your life has God used to lead you to spiritual growth?

7. a. How did Josiah respond when he heard the words of the Law?

b. Why is it spiritually healthy to acknowledge the gravity of personal sin?

8. a. Describe God's judgment that awaited Judah (see 2 Kings 23:26-27).

   b. How did God show grace to godly Josiah? How did Josiah respond in leading the people?

   c. How do you respond when God confronts your sin? Think of a recent experience and your response to share with your group.

Fourth Day: Read 2 Kings 23:21-30; 2 Chronicles 35.

Josiah led all of Judah in worship and revival before his death.

9. a. Which details regarding the preparations of this Passover celebration stand out to you and why?

   b. What impacts you personally about Josiah's worshipful celebration with the people?

10. a. Describe the events that led to Josiah's death.

    b. Why do you think Josiah acted as he did with King Necho?

    c. What important lessons can you learn from this sad conclusion to Josiah's life?

Fifth Day: Read 2 Kings 23:31–25:30; 2 Chronicles 36.

Judah's final kings led in the nation's descent toward captivity.

11. How did each of Judah's final four kings contribute to its final fall?
    Jehoahaz

    Jehoiakim

    Jehoiachin

    Zedekiah

12. a. What did the Lord do to reach the people?

    b. How did the people respond?

    c. How can you encourage your group as you think about the undeserved grace and faithfulness God has shown to you?

13. In what ways do you see God's righteous ways in Jerusalem's fall?

Review 2 Kings 21–25; 2 Chronicles 33–36.

God's righteousness always prevails.

14. What have you learned about the rightness of God's ways and the destructive path of sin?

Passage Discovery (homiletics, word study, etc.) for Group and Administrative Leaders: 2 Chronicles 33–36

Lecture Notes

Next step: Read Lesson Notes.

Lesson Notes

2 Kings 21–25; 2 Chronicles 33–36

Focus Verse

"Because your heart was responsive and ... you humbled yourself before me and tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the LORD." – 2 Chronicles 34:27

Outline

- Sin's Stronghold in Judah – 2 Kings 21; 2 Chronicles 33
- God's Lifeline Through Josiah – 2 Kings 22:1–23:30; 2 Chronicles 34–35
- Judah's Fall to Babylon – 2 Kings 23:31–25:30; 2 Chronicles 36

Engage

The road of life contains many twists and turns. We often look to experts, friends, and even the internet to find help to navigate our many choices. However, no matter what we do or where we look, we take far too many wrong turns. How quickly our conversations, relationships, and thoughts can be steered in the wrong direction! Our internal battles with sinful desires and wrong thinking seem constant. We certainly make our trek through life as sinners in need of a Savior. Where can we turn to find the right way to go? **God always leads us on the right path, but His way is seldom easy or popular.** However, God's way is always right. He can be trusted with what we cannot understand.

The people in Judah found themselves entrenched in sin's dangerous and deadly path. They had disregarded God's law and scorned His prophets. The spiritual reforms led by Hezekiah were forgotten, as even Judah's priests and kings intentionally led the people toward idols. As the people descended deeper into sin's stronghold, evil permeated all parts of life. Like the northern kingdom of Israel, Judah's rejection of God left them poised for His judgment. **God's righteousness always prevails.** God's corrective paths may require suffering, but in the face of evil, God stands strong.

Sin's Stronghold in Judah – 2 Chronicles 33 (2 Kings 21)

(2 Kings 21–25 and 2 Chronicles 33–36 record similar accounts of Judah's final days before her fall and exile to Babylon. These notes draw primarily from 2 Chronicles, adding relevant details from 2 Kings.)

The glorious transformations begun by Hezekiah's reformation passed into the hands of his son Manasseh. Perhaps the buried roots of idolatry within the people of Judah resprouted when

Hezekiah's walk with God weakened near the end of his life.[1] **Judah's deep-seated leanings toward moral corruption and idolatry left her spiritually vulnerable.** Manasseh flung open the door for idol worship and wicked behavior. Judah fell into deep spiritual decline under his reign.

Manasseh's Rebellion – 33:1-10

Manasseh's reign began at age 12 and lasted 55 years. **Heralded as Judah's longest reigning king, Manasseh's rebellion propelled Judah into utter spiritual decay.** Known for his evil in the Lord's eyes, Manasseh followed the detestable practices of the Canaanites – the people God had driven from the land. During most of his tenure as king, he served as Assyria's vassal. He reversed Hezekiah's purifying religious policies and plunged the nation back into the wickedness of Ahaz.[2]

Horrendous sin infiltrated the kingdom of Judah through Manasseh. He erected altars to Baal and rebuilt the high places. He constructed Asherah poles like those of King Ahab of Israel. He desecrated God's temple in Jerusalem with altars to the starry hosts and a carved image formed by his hands. The people became deaf to God and ignored His voice. Responsible for wholesale shedding of innocent blood, Manasseh participated in the terrible ritual of child sacrifice with his own son. He also consulted mediums and practiced sorcery. Led far astray from God, Judah plunged into evil worse than the heathen nations before her. Manasseh shunned God and ignored His merciful warnings, which ultimately led to his humiliation.

Manasseh's Repentance – 33:11-13

Sent by their king, Assyria's army commanders took Manasseh prisoner, bound him, placed a hook in his nose, and took him to Babylon. **In a surprisingly swift turn, Manasseh's distress compelled him to humble himself greatly and seek God's favor.** Righteous and holy God longs to extend mercy to sinners who sincerely repent and turn to Him.[3] Moved by Manasseh's prayer, God listened and welcomed him. In this moment of extreme distress and humble prayer, Manasseh came to know God. By God's grace, Manasseh returned to Jerusalem and to rule his kingdom.

Manasseh's Reforms – 33:14-20

Manasseh received God's forgiveness and began to live a completely changed life. He restored the walls of the outer city of Jerusalem and stationed military fortifications throughout Judah. **Manasseh removed foreign gods and purged Jerusalem of the altars and images of idolatry.** He restored the Lord's altar and sacrificed fellowship and thank offerings. He even told Judah to serve the Lord, the God of Israel. Sadly, Manasseh's reforms probably came too little and too late to deeply impact his children or Judah's citizens. The people of Judah continued to worship the Lord, but they did so at the high places of idolatry rather than at the temple as God required. Deceptively and willfully, Satan raises strongholds of sin to challenge God's work in His people.

1: Hezekiah's last days: 2 Chronicles 32:31
2: Ahaz's evil reign: 2 Kings 16
3: God pardons sinners: Micah 7:18

Amon's Short Reign – 33:21-25

Consequences of Manasseh's sin remained. He repented too late to save his son Amon from sin's corrupting influence. **Amon refused to follow his father's example of repentance and instead chose to promote evil in the kingdom of Judah.** His short reign of two years ended when he was murdered by his own officials.

God's Lifeline Through Josiah – 2 Chronicles 34–35 (2 Kings 22:1–23:30)

A godly son raised in an evil home and corrupt society, Josiah's wholehearted love for God makes him stand apart among Judah's kings. Josiah took the throne at the height of Judah's corruption. A born leader, Josiah sought to rid Judah of idolatry and restore her relationship with God. He reinstated God's law as a way of life and worshiped the Lord in the restored temple of Jerusalem. With Josiah's godly influence, Judah knew prosperity and peace with God. Both 2 Kings 22 and 2 Chronicles 34 record several pivotal change points in Josiah's kingship during the 8th, 12th, and 18th years of his reign.

Josiah's Heart for God – 34:1-3a

Josiah ascended to Judah's throne when he was 8 years old. He did right in the eyes of the Lord throughout his 31 years on the throne. **Without turning aside to the left or right, Josiah walked in the ways of David.** Josiah decidedly chose to seek God – at age 16! As a young but effective leader, Josiah sought God with passion and zeal as he fought against idolatry in the nation.

Josiah's Reformation – 34:3b-7

Josiah launched a deliberate attack on Satan's strongholds within Judah. He purged the nation of idolatry like no one before him. He directed the destruction of high places and incense altars dedicated to Baal. He also removed the Asherah poles, carved idols, and cast images from Judah and Jerusalem. Josiah's cleansing even reached into the northern kingdom as far as Naphtali.

Josiah's Restoration – 34:8–35:19

The Temple Repaired – 34:8-13

After he removed idolatry from the land, Josiah turned his attention toward restoration of God's temple. **During the 18th year of his reign, Josiah sought to purify the land and restore the temple of the Lord his God.** Money collected from the remnant in Israel and the people of Judah financed the temple's repair. Supervisors, workers, carpenters, and builders cooperatively refurbished God's temple in Jerusalem.

God's Law Recovered – 34:14-28

During the temple renovation, Hilkiah the priest discovered the book of the law, probably the Pentateuch or major portions of the book of Deuteronomy. Archaeologists tell us a common practice of that day was the placing of the Pentateuch in the cornerstone of a building. This placement may have taken place when Solomon built the temple during his reign. Moses gave explicit instructions for depositing the book of the law in the innermost place of God's sanctuary.[4] **Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, the royal secretary, who read the law completely himself and then to Josiah.**

God's Word Pierced Josiah's Heart – 34:19

When Josiah heard the book of the law read, he tore his robes. He became aware that Judah had transgressed greatly against God and broken every commandment recorded in the book. **God's righteous requirements recorded by Moses also included His warnings of judgment.** Josiah's humble response revealed his depth of understanding. He knew that Judah had gravely sinned against God and faced judgment.

Josiah Sought Further Guidance from God – 34:20-28

Immediately, Josiah sought further instruction from God and sent officials to inquire of the Lord. In response to their question, God spoke through Huldah, the prophetess. She first described unrepentant Judah and the disaster awaiting the nation. While Josiah and many others followed God, the nation's majority complied outwardly without a genuine change of heart. **Divine judgment would befall Judah.**

Huldah spoke next to Josiah, whose spiritual, tender heart had responded so deeply to God's Word. **God heard Josiah's humble prayer and acknowledged his repentant heart.** Josiah would be spared from viewing and experiencing the coming punishment upon his nation. God shows mercy to those who turn to Him, even when living amid an evil generation.

The People Redirected – 34:29–35:19

Josiah led Judah in a revival of worship that culminated in a nationwide celebration of the Passover festival. **Josiah's heart for his people was for them to turn away from sin and toward God and His righteousness.**

God's Law Read Publicly – 34:29-33

Understanding the challenges his people faced, Josiah leveraged his leadership as king to proclaim and exalt God's Word. He summoned the elders to the temple and gathered the people – from the least to the greatest. Josiah himself read the words of the book of the covenant. He renewed the covenant in the presence of the Lord. He called on everyone to pledge themselves to keep God's commands with all their heart and souls. Josiah's actions speak to us today. **We should anchor our lives on God's Word and lead others to know God through His Word.** Josiah determinedly removed every detestable idol from the territory. As long as Josiah lived, the people followed the Lord.

4: Moses' instructions: Deuteronomy 31:25-26

The Promised Guidance of God

Josiah earnestly sought to know God's will. How can we possibly know God's leading in specific situations? While there is no simple formula to apply, we can call upon God for His guidance in every situation life brings. Some helpful spiritual tools found in Scripture include:

Expectant Prayer

Pray for God's guidance with humility.[5] Set aside your own limited judgment.[6] Look to God for wise direction and counsel.[7] Lean upon God and depend on Him through continual and persistent prayer that desires His will in every situation and decision.

God's Word

Along with prayer, God offers guidance through His Word. Scripture reveals that God promises to guide and provide wisdom to believers who seek and surrender to His leading. As He leads, God always upholds His Word and never leads us on a path toward sin. Instead, God directs us toward His righteous ways.[8] Do biblical principles guide your path?

Confirming Circumstances and Wise Counselors

At times when we pray for guidance, God leads by showing His reasonable and good path through confirming circumstances and through the words of wise counselors.[9] Following prayer, how will you trust God to direct your next steps?[10]

Inward Peace

When we take our need for wisdom to God in prayer, He often gives guidance through a settled inward peace concerning our decision. Conversely, an inward check or unsettledness should give us caution about proceeding. God's way provides unexplainable peace, even when following His leading brings challenges.[11] Do you sense and await God's peace following prayer when you seek His direction?

Passover Celebrated – 2 Chronicles 35:1-19

Josiah led the nation to celebrate Passover on the 14th day of the first month, God's appointed time for Passover. He assigned priests to their temple duties and called upon the Levites to serve in their family divisions. Josiah, his officials, and the Levite leaders provided Passover offerings and sacrifices for the entire nation. **All the people of Judah worshiped and honored God together as they celebrated Passover.** Unlike any other Passover celebration since the days of Samuel, this event stands out as a beautiful chapter in Josiah's legacy.

5: God guides: Psalm 25:9
6: Trust the Lord: Proverbs 3:5-6
7: Seeking God: James 1:5-7
8: God guides rightly: Psalm 23:3b
9: Benefit of advisors: Proverbs 11:14
10: Live wisely: Ephesians 5:15-17
11: Peace beyond understanding: Philippians 4:6-7

Josiah's Assassination – 2 Chronicles 35:20-27

Following his great Passover revival, Josiah missed a warning from God that proved deadly. Neglecting to seek God's counsel or further guidance, Josiah marched out in battle against Necho, the king of Egypt. Necho sent messengers to Josiah declaring, "God has told me to hurry; so stop opposing God, who is with me, or he will destroy you."

Undeterred, Josiah proceeded into the battle and was fatally wounded. God's Word carefully describes the failures of its heroes so that all will know that only God is perfect. Every human being, including Josiah, needs God's redemption. **Josiah stands, even in death, as an exceptionally beloved king.** All of Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. Josiah's reign honored God and upheld His righteousness.

Judah's Fall to Babylon – 2 Chronicles 36 (2 Kings 23:31–25:30)

The last chapters of 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles describe the kings and events that led to Judah's terrible siege by Babylon, starting in 605 B.C. **Altogether, the period of Judah's four final kings lasted less than 24 years.** Three of Josiah's sons and one of his grandsons reigned as king during these short and painful years, as Babylon's menacing threat accelerated.

The Final Kings – 36:1-14

Josiah's son Jehoahaz reigned only three months, choosing evil and setting aside his father Josiah's principles. Necho, the king of Egypt, deposed and captured Jehoahaz and made his brother king in his place. Necho took Jehoahaz to Egypt, where he died in captivity, as Jeremiah prophesied.[12]

Egyptian king Necho made Eliakim king and changed his name to Jehoiakim. He served as Egypt's puppet king during his 11-year reign and became a vassal of Nebuchadnezzar. **God sent His prophet Jeremiah to speak His word to Jehoiakim, who refused to listen.**[13] King Nebuchadnezzar attacked, bound, and carried Jehoiakim off to Babylon along with articles from Jerusalem's temple.

Jehoiachin, Josiah's grandson, reigned three months and 10 days. **Like his predecessors, Jehoiachin did evil in the Lord's eyes.** He also found himself deported, along with valuable temple articles, to King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon.

Zedekiah, Josiah's final son to take the throne, also chose evil over God's ways. Not only did Zedekiah rebel against God, he also revolted against Nebuchadnezzar. Stiff-necked and hard-hearted, Zedekiah would not turn to the Lord. He also led the priests and people to unfaithfulness, detestable practices, and the defiling of the Jerusalem temple. **All four of Judah's final kings rejected God and His righteousness in favor of committing only evil all the time.**

12: Jeremiah's prophecy: Jeremiah 22:10-12
13: Jehoiakim's rebellion: Jeremiah 36:1-3, 20-26

The "Rightness" of God's Holy Standards

The Doctrine of Righteousness

God's perfect character never changes. **Righteousness refers to God's moral character and conduct – everything He is and does is always right.** God achieves His good purposes in both His acts of mercy and love and His acts of judgment. God's perfect righteousness means that He cannot tolerate sin. He executes just punishment upon those who reject Him, always with an open heart to forgive even the worst of sinners. Time and again, God warns sinners of judgment that will be faced by the unrepentant and unbelieving.

God's standards of righteousness never change. God graciously revealed His righteous requirements when He gave the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai. He explained what right living looks like in terms we can grasp. However, no one can attain God's righteous standards, which must be met perfectly. We are born with a sinful nature and commit sin. Romans 3:10 explains, "There is no one righteous, not even one." God understands our inability to achieve the righteousness He requires. **In love and mercy, God provided a way for sinners to be right with Him through faith in Jesus.**

When we do not recognize our unrighteousness, we measure ourselves with flawed standards. Looking around at people, we gain a false sense of security. We can easily find someone who behaves worse than we do. **We fail to measure ourselves against God's standard of righteousness and do not realize our need for a Savior.** As a result, we stand before God condemned, lacking the righteousness He requires. Our lack of genuine righteousness should instead lead us to seek the One who is truly righteous – Jesus.

God does not leave us stuck in our unrighteous state. He sacrificed His one and only Son, Jesus Christ, to pay sin's penalty on our behalf.[14] The Holy Spirit helps us recognize that we cannot muster up the righteousness God requires. God invites us to turn to Jesus to provide what we cannot. **Gratefully, we accept Jesus' sacrifice on the cross so we can be clothed in the righteous robes He offers to all who believe.** We rejoice that Christ placed His righteousness upon us so we can stand before God forgiven – set free from the condemnation we rightfully deserve. Praise God for His righteousness and His gift of "rightness" purchased for us by Jesus' shed blood!

The Final Word – 36:15-23

God's Messengers Rejected – 36:15-16

In long-suffering mercy and great pity, God sent His messengers again and again to Judah. Instead of repenting, they spat words of mockery toward God's prophets. God's gracious words of warning bounced off their hardened hearts with prideful scoffing. The people left God with no other choice. **When God's promises of salvation are ignored, His promises of judgment will be fulfilled.**

14: God's gift: John 3:16

God's People Taken Captive – 36:17-21

Righteous God will not endlessly tolerate willful sinners who refuse to repent. **In judgment for sin, God raised up the Babylonians who brutally attacked Judah.** They viciously killed young and old, men and women, not even sparing the elderly or infirm. Only a remnant survived their purging onslaught.

This invading army set fire to God's holy temple and carried off its sacred treasures. Jerusalem's walls were smashed and palaces burned. Devastation overwhelmed the city God gave to His people. **The Babylonians took a remnant of Judah's citizens into captivity as servants.** For 70 years, Israel's land experienced a Sabbath rest, as Jeremiah prophesied.[15] The remnant God spared awaited His day of restoration.

God's Hope Remained Steadfast – 36:22-23

God's righteous judgment crushed Satan's stronghold of sin among the Israelites. In great mercy, God removed His people from their place of sin to preserve them as a people and carry out His promises. **God's work did not lie dormant during the 70 years of their captivity.** Persia eventually overthrew Babylon, setting the stage for God's people to return to the land He had promised them.

God's sovereign hand over history should cause us to marvel. Sin never gets the final word. **God's righteousness always prevails.** The words God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah came to pass in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia. The Lord moved Cyrus to proclaim that the Lord, the God of heaven, appointed him to build a temple for Him at Jerusalem in Judah. Cyrus allowed the people God preserved by His own hand to return to Jerusalem. God's plans for Israel, the world, and His Messiah moved forward.

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

As Judah moved toward eventual exile to Babylon, a few hopeful moments appeared through the reigns of mostly evil kings. After wholesale capitulation to evil and idolatry, Manasseh cried out to God in repentance. God mercifully delivered him from his Assyrian captors. He brought spiritual reforms, which quickly waned after his death. Josiah became king when he was 8 years old and exemplified true devotion to God his entire life. He strongly led Judah and even Israel to seek God in purity of faith. Josiah's nationwide Passover celebration displayed the beauty of God-honoring worship with a sense of revival.

Despite these moments of spiritual renewal, Judah's evil continued. Judah's last four kings only perpetuated and escalated the stronghold of sin and idolatry that captured God's chosen people. The people of Judah mocked and ignored God's prophets and spurned His mercy. **In righteous judgment and according to God's sovereign plan, the Babylonians overthrew Judah and destroyed Jerusalem.** Most of the people were killed, and a captured remnant was taken to Babylon to serve as

---

15: Seventy years in Babylon: Jeremiah 25:11; 29:10

slaves for 70 years. While this scene appeared dismal, God's plan was not finished. God would raise up Persia to overthrow Babylon. He would move a king named Cyrus to take His sovereign plan into its next redemptive chapter. God can be trusted, even when His people fail.

Apply It

How do you respond when your circumstances seem to pause at a grim point? There are times when everything hopeful seems to crumble, and we are left surveying damaged wreckage and experiencing incredible pain. Certainly, Israel and Judah's hope seemed to fade into nothingness against the backdrop of brutal foreign invaders and compounding loss. We now know that God silently waited and perpetually worked through these dismal years in Israel's history. Perhaps unexpected tragedy or loss has shaken any sense of stability or normalcy in your world. Maybe you have riveting questions that remain unanswered. How can you hold onto hope when circumstances seem hopeless? **Believing God and trusting His sovereignty and goodness is never a risk.** God does more than we can imagine in ways we never thought possible. Will you trust God, even if believing Him means holding painfully but firmly to a yet unseen victory?

Judah failed to follow God and slipped gradually and terribly into Satan's stronghold of sin and idolatry. When we look at our world, we can become discouraged by the extensive acceptance of practices God declares as sinful. Today, sin appears normal, and righteousness seems strange. How do we thrive and survive as believers who desire to walk with God and lead others to Him? Draw your standards from God and His Word. Love the people around you like God has loved you. **Just as God spoke His truth through His prophets, God will help you stand for Him in your circle of influence.** How might God lead you to pray for the salvation of people in your nation and around the world? We will not win the world for Christ by pridefully withdrawing, but rather by engaging with people who desperately need a Savior, just as we do. This is the calling and privilege of sinners who have found refuge in Christ.

Judah and Israel's story offers a stern warning about the danger and destruction caused by worshiping anything besides God. **No matter what you face today, worship God.** In times of grief and uncertainty, worship God. In times of joy and celebration, worship God. In times of change or seasons of stability, worship God. Bowing before God represents life's highest honor and our greatest need. No hope or stability exists apart from the God who created you and knows you best. How will you praise and worship God as you navigate your greatest challenge or celebrate your highest joy today? Will you wait for a crisis like Manasseh? Will you cry out to God early and often like Josiah? God has lovingly designed your path to draw you to Himself. Only God is worthy of our worship.

All Scripture quotations in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ® NIV ®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Isaiah Part 1 – Mission and Message

Isaiah 1–66

Lesson Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 17 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the lecture help you better understand God's redemptive plan?

2. What from the notes encouraged you to trust God in a challenge you currently face?

Second Day: Read Isaiah 1:1 and other references listed in the questions below.

God called Isaiah to speak as His prophet to Judah.

3. a. What kings reigned in Judah while Isaiah served as God's prophet?

© BSF 2022 (This material may be downloaded from mybsf.org and used by BSF class members in connection with their personal BSF class studies. It may not be otherwise reproduced without BSF's written permission.)

b. Skim 2 Chronicles 26–32 and briefly describe the spiritual climate in Judah during Isaiah's ministry.

4. The following verses point to the major themes interwoven throughout Isaiah's prophecy. Summarize the various themes emerging from the following verses in Isaiah.

   1:2-3

   1:16-18

   9:19; 22:5

   9:6; 11:1-3

   27:6; 32:1-2; 40:1-2; 43:1-2

5. Isaiah's primary message weaves warnings of judgment with promises of hope.

   a. Which message highlighted above was particularly meaningful to you? Why?

   b. What brings you hope in overwhelming situations?

Third Day: Read Isaiah 6:1-4.

Isaiah saw a glorious vision of God on His throne.

6. Ponder and then describe the setting and scene of Isaiah's vision. What strikes you most and why?

7. a. What stands out to you in the *actions* of the seraphim in these verses?

   b. Look closely at the *words* spoken by the seraphim. What truths about God are revealed in each phrase, and why are these things important?

8. What has formed your thoughts about what God is like? How does what you are learning expand your thinking?

Fourth Day: Read Isaiah 6:5-8.

Isaiah responded to almighty God.

9. a. Describe Isaiah's immediate response to seeing God in His glory.

   b. In what ways are your views of yourself and others distorted when you fail to see God for who He truly is?

10. a. Tell how God met Isaiah when he became acutely aware of his own sinfulness.

    b. How has God brought you to a painful awareness of personal sin?

    c. Why is recognizing your sin a necessary step in coming to Christ for salvation *and* in relying on the Holy Spirit's power to overcome sin as a believer?

11. a. What did you learn from God's question to Isaiah and Isaiah's response in verse 8?

    b. How responsive are you when God calls you to work for Him? What holds you back?

Fifth Day: Read Isaiah 6:9-13.

God called Isaiah to a challenging mission.

12. a. Summarize the message God sent Isaiah to deliver to rebellious Israel.

    b. For how long was Isaiah commanded to preach this difficult message?

13. a. To what lengthy and difficult task has God called you?

    b. Give ways God helps you persevere when you see little visible fruit coming from your sacrifice and obedience.

14. What message of hope did God incorporate into His call to Isaiah in verse 13?

Sixth Day: Review Isaiah 6.

God gave Isaiah a message for his day and our day.

15. What truth about God offered you steadying hope or led you to humble worship?

Passage Discovery (homiletics, word study, etc.) for Group and Administrative Leaders: Isaiah 6

Lecture Notes

Next step: Read Lesson Notes.

Lesson Notes

Isaiah 1–66

Focus Verse

"Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD, the LORD himself, is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation." – Isaiah 12:2

Outline

- Isaiah's Mission – Isaiah 1:1; 6:1-13
- Isaiah's Message – Isaiah 1–66

Engage

Have you ever been in a crowd where people were speaking an unfamiliar language? What happens when, against the background static of an unknown language, you hear someone speaking in words you can understand? Your ears perk up and your mind engages as you focus on a voice that slices through the surrounding noise. In a similar way, God's voice breaks through this world's noisy dissonance to speak to those who will hear Him. **God speaks truth that cannot be silenced by this world's noise.** The greater question is whether we stand poised to hear Him.

God anointed Isaiah, a faithful prophet who fearlessly spoke God's message to a people on the brink of judgment. Isaiah delivered a tough message that exposed sin and announced coming peril. He called people to repent and offered hope of God's ultimate victory through the promised Messiah. **God gave Isaiah a message for his day and our day.** By divine inspiration, Isaiah's prophecy spoke to current events around him but also looked far into the future. A lot of background noise clamors in our ears as we come to this ancient book. Will you listen for God's voice as we study Isaiah?

Who Was Isaiah?

- **The Prophet:** The meaning of Isaiah's name relates directly to his theme – "The LORD is Salvation."
- **The Audience:** Judah during Israel's downfall to Assyria and the rising threat of Babylon prior to Judah's exile
- **The Message:** God's judgment against Judah and His comfort and hope for Judah's exiles
- **The Images to Remember:** The Suffering Servant, a vineyard, the Lion and the Lamb

We will study Isaiah in four lessons:

- Isaiah Part 1 – Mission and Message (overview and themes of Isaiah)
- Isaiah Part 2 – God's Promise of Judgment and Message of Hope – Isaiah 1–39
- Isaiah Part 3 – The Deliverance of God's People – Isaiah 40–48
- Isaiah Part 4 – The Suffering Servant and Future Glory of God's People – Isaiah 49–66

This series seeks to highlight the interwoven and escalating themes within Isaiah's grand and well-loved writings. **As we approach this beloved book, we seek an enlarged understanding of how both the familiar and lesser-known passages within Isaiah fit into Old Testament history and the unfolding of God's redemptive plan for humanity.** We will consider specific passages within the context of Isaiah's primary themes. Ultimately, a study of Isaiah should call us to worship the God who has planned it all and loves us so amazingly.

Isaiah's Mission – Isaiah 1:1; 6:1-13

The Man Isaiah

What kind of a person does the God of eternity call to speak for Him within space and time on earth? Isaiah was someone God chose for this task. We often hear the name "Isaiah" spoken almost reverentially. His majestic words are quoted often and greatly loved. Who was this man whose writings warranted 66 chapters in the Bible? God certainly spoke mightily through Isaiah. Yet his oracles and Judah's history inform us that he lived and ministered through difficult days. **God charged Isaiah to deliver a challenging message to the rebellious people of Judah.** He spoke words of hope that broke through the severe news like rays of light. Even so, his task could not have been easy. Isaiah, the man who stood before kings with God's message, certainly faced many hardships.

Isaiah's father was named Amoz – not to be confused with the prophet Amos. We know Isaiah was married and had at least two sons.[1] He did not give his wife's name in his writings but called her a "prophetess," possibly designating her status as his wife.[2] **Isaiah likely lived in Jerusalem, as his activities seemed to center on the city.**

Many speculate that Isaiah had a close connection with and perhaps a possible descent from royalty, given his ready access to kings and the palace. His ministry likely spanned as many as 58 years, given the Judean kings under whom he ministered. **Most information about Isaiah comes from Jewish tradition.** Convention holds that Isaiah died at the hands of Manasseh, sawn apart while in the trunk of a tree seeking refuge. The Christian writer Justin Martyr (A.D. 100-165) associated Isaiah with the heroes who were sawn in two mentioned in Hebrews 11:37.

The Times of Isaiah – 1:1

Isaiah's ministry took place under four Judean kings: Uzziah (Azariah), Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. The year Uzziah died, Isaiah received God's call to begin his prophetic ministry. Internally,

---

1: Isaiah's two sons: Isaiah 7:3; 8:1-4
2: Isaiah's wife: Isaiah 8:3

Judah faced moral decline, ungodly patterns of behavior, and deeply entrenched idolatry. Externally, rising Assyrian power left Judah situated between two enemies – Assyria and Egypt.[3]

Isaiah stepped up for God and entered the historical scene emerging in Israel. The northern kingdom's deliverance into Assyrian exile occurred during Isaiah's ministry. God called Isaiah to foretell Judah's coming Babylonian captivity amid escalating sin and idolatry. Chapters 1–39 anticipate events during Isaiah's lifetime, while chapters 40–66 reach far into the future. **Like someone standing on a hill viewing gathering storm clouds, Isaiah foresaw the coming peril awaiting his nation.**

Isaiah entered Judah's story and God's plan at a critical moment. Would Judah regain its footing or continue to seek wealth, prosperity, and superficial religion rather than God? God's faithful, beckoning call to His straying people echoed also through Isaiah's contemporary prophets. God sent Amos and Hosea to the northern kingdom of Israel to call the people back to the Lord before it was too late. God sent Jonah to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. Micah prophesied to both Judah and Israel. This flurry of prophetic activity preceded the fall of Damascus in 732 B.C., the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C., and the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C. As evil escalated, so did God's serious invitations to repentance. Though Isaiah played an indirect role in prophesying Israel's fall, he directed his primary message to Judah.

Isaiah's Divine Commissioning – 6:1-13

Isaiah's vision of the exalted Lord created a life-changing and life-defining moment for him. His personal encounter with God modeled the repentance and restoration his nation so desperately needed. A new direction, motivation, and purpose governed the rest of his earthly days. God's incomparable power and glorious presence would confirm, strengthen, and sustain him in his God-given ministry.

The Glorious Scene – 6:1-4

The Earthly Circumstances – 6:1a

A national crisis preceded the glorious scene that Isaiah encountered. After a 52-year reign, King Uzziah died with leprosy.[4] Assyria established a stronghold in the Middle East under a new ruler, Tiglath-Pileser.[5] Judah's change of leadership and this accompanying military threat sounded yet another alarm to awaken Judah to return to God.

The Heavenly Vision – 6:1b-4

A clear vision of God provides a stabilizing perspective in trying times. When we place our eyes on the majesty and glory of God Almighty, the people and circumstances that threaten us lose power over us. Isaiah's encounter with God offered a powerful starting point for his ministry. **Isaiah received a vision of the transcendent Lord seated on a throne with the train of His robe filling the temple.** Unable to look upon God, seraphim covered their faces and feet with their wings. They acknowledged their lowly state as they served the great and awesome God. These angelic beings offered a triad of repeated praise as they worshiped God Most High – the exalted One who exists in

---

3: Assyrian and Egyptian threats: Isaiah 7:18; 10:24
4: Uzziah's death: 2 Chronicles 26:16-23
5: Tiglath-Pileser: 2 Kings 15:29; 16:7-10; 1 Chronicles 5:6, 26; 2 Chronicles 28:20

three persons. They called to one another, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory."[6] The doorposts and thresholds shook as the temple filled with smoke.[7]

God's holiness refers to both His absolute moral purity *and* His "otherness." Unstained by sin, God stands apart from sinful beings; He is like none other in majesty and might. God's glory represents the sum of all His attributes. The glory of God fills the earth through creation, God's omnipresence, and His unlimited power. God displays His attributes in the world He made.[8] **Isaiah's vision of God's exalted position alongside the seraphim's posture pictures a divine reality that should shape our thinking and the way we live.**

Isaiah's Humble Response – 6:5-7

Isaiah's Awareness of Sin – 6:5

How we view God directly relates to how we view ourselves. A true understanding of God decimates human pride. When we understand God's holiness, we recognize how short we fall before Him. **Isaiah found himself so undone by God's majesty that he declared, "Woe to me!"** While Isaiah did not confess specific sin, he became acutely aware of the deep sinfulness that permeated him. He pointed to his "unclean lips," recognizing that the words of his mouth flowed from a heart ruined by sin and deserving of judgment. Isaiah also acknowledged that he lived among a people with unclean lips. Sin's damage permeated all those around Isaiah, even God's covenant people, but also pervades all humankind.

How we view God directly relates to how we view ourselves. A true understanding of God decimates human pride. When we understand God's holiness, we recognize how short we fall before Him.

God reveals our sin not to leave us stuck and without hope, but to come to us with cleansing and restoration. The beautiful hymn written by Walter Chalmers Smith (1824-1908) vividly captures Isaiah's amazing vision and our privilege to share his glimpse of God: "Immortal, invisible, God only wise, in light inaccessible, hid from our eyes. Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days, Almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise."[a]

God's Cleansing Grace – 6:6-7

God's cleansing grace took flight as one of the seraphs approached Isaiah with a live coal. **God took the initiative to bring cleansing to repentant Isaiah.** This burning coal came from heaven's altar, representing God's provision of cleansing that satisfies His holy requirements.[9] By one divine act, the live coal touched Isaiah's mouth, removing his guilt and atoning for his sin. The atonement Isaiah received accomplished more than merely covering up his sin. God's intervening grace satisfied His holy wrath against Isaiah's sin, anticipating Jesus' coming sacrifice, which provides atonement for all who trust Him for salvation. Isaiah's faith in God's provision would one day be fully satisfied in Jesus the promised Deliverer[10] through whom all the nations of the world would be blessed.[11] Those who see God and recognize their sin come to Him and find restoration by His grace.[12] Like He did with Isaiah, God offers us cleansing while we are still sinners.[13]

6: God thrice holy: Revelation 4:6-9
7: God's presence: Exodus 19:16-18; 2 Chronicles 5:13-14
8: God's glory in creation: Psalm 8:1-4; 19:1; 104:24-25; Isaiah 40:26; Romans 1:20; Colossians 1:16-17
9: Heaven's altar: Revelation 8:3-5
10: Promised Deliverer: Genesis 3:15; Romans 3:25
11: All nations blessed: Genesis 12:1-3
12: Peter's experience with Jesus: Luke 5:1-11
13: Salvation in Christ: Romans 3:21-26; 5:8
a: "Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise," Walter C. Smith, 1867, public domain

Bowing Humbly Before Our God Most High

The Doctrine of God the Father

The opportunity to gaze into Isaiah's encounter with the living God offers us a profound privilege. We love thinking about God's nearness and the intimate relationship we enjoy with Him. He is Immanuel – the God who came near to us. He remains actively present in our everyday lives. When we pray in Jesus' name, God listens and acts on our behalf. As God's beloved children, He inclines His heart and ear to us with lavish compassion and grace.

We do not think as often about God's transcendence – that He is utterly set apart from us in inexpressible ways. When Isaiah witnessed a vision of God in His glory, he did not seize the chance to voice his list of questions or complaints. Instead, in an instant and almost instinctive response, Isaiah bowed low – painfully aware of the gulf that separated him from God. His glimpse of God's exalted holiness brought the realization that he was a man with tainted lips who lived among similarly flawed people. **Seeing our heavenly Father as infinitely exalted above us provides a necessary foundation to fully appreciate what God has done on our behalf.** God bridged the chasm that separated us by sending His Son in the flesh to die a painful death to overcome death's stranglehold on us.

We are not God's equal in any way. To see God as a friend or force we can take or leave as a matter of convenience or choice misrepresents undeniable truth. **If we fail to recognize God's supremely exalted place over us, our view of ourselves remains corrupted.** Without understanding God's transcendence, we remain clueless about the inexpressible wonder of His nearness.

Many things about God should leave us speechless and undone, like Isaiah. The more deeply we understand who God truly is, the more wonderful and shocking His tender love becomes. The God who stands infinitely beyond us in every way longs to draw us close. Can you believe that? He loves us too much to ignore the gap between us. The Father demonstrated His barrier-breaking love in the amazing sacrifice of His Son. **God came near to us so that we could draw near to Him.** The holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty loves us with an everlasting love. Will you rejoice that God made a way to cleanse you? He sends His people out to tell the world who He truly is. May a fresh sense of wonder and worship fill us as we ponder the majesty and mercy of our exalted God!

Isaiah's Appointment to God's Service – 6:8-13

Isaiah's Willingness to Go – 6:8

The Lord Himself asked Isaiah a question, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" God sends specific people to specific places to carry out His assignments. Isaiah had seen God in His glory. He gained a proper view of the desperate need within himself and those around him**. Cleansed and now called by God, Isaiah presented himself as ready to fulfill God's mission.** The simplicity of his surrender spoke volumes as he declared, "Here am I. Send me!" Isaiah offered himself as available to God and willing to be sent to do His work. This heart cry rose readily from a man who recognized the spiritual peril his generation faced as they stood accountable to Holy God. Surrender to God

creates a growing willingness to yield personal plans and priorities to embrace God's call, along with any personal sacrifice required. When God does the sending, His power accompanies His call.

Isaiah's Words to Speak – 6:9-13

God did not give Isaiah an easy task or popular message. Instead, God sent Isaiah to warn of judgment and to face constant rejection. God's people lived like they were in a drunken stupor – with dull ears and calloused hearts. God presented this mission to His humbled servant and declared a visibly unsuccessful outcome before he even started. Isaiah asked how long he would be commissioned to this challenging assignment. **God revealed that Isaiah would declare this warning until, by an act of divine judgment, the land was devastated and its people dispersed.**

A ray of hope broke through as God gave Isaiah this solemn assignment. **A "holy seed" would sprout out of the stump left by sin's destructive judgment in Judah.**[14] God's promises would be preserved and fulfilled, despite Judah's harsh penalty for sin. A believing remnant would emerge to carry forth God's message and promise to the world. This "holy seed" was none other than the Messiah, who would rise from the stump or root of Jesse and King David. God infuses His messages of judgment with a call to hope.

Isaiah's Message – Isaiah 1–66

Isaiah's Well-Loved Book

Isaiah's glimpse of God's glory surely impacted every word he wrote and spoke on God's behalf. The book of Isaiah stands tall within the Old Testament. Isaiah's role and message does not exceed that of the other Old Testament prophets in its importance. However, the majesty captured in Isaiah's words elevates this book in the eyes of many. Well-loved messianic prophecies offer insight into God's plan of redemption through His Son. People often ponder and memorize beautiful passages such as those found in chapters 40, 53, and 55. While some parts of Isaiah are familiar, other sections are neglected. **Isaiah's message played a critical role in Israel's history and revealed much about God's plan of redemption, some of which remains future to us.**

While the Bible was written without verses or chapter divisions, the established structure of Isaiah parallels that of the entire Bible. The Bible has 66 books; Isaiah has 66 chapters. Isaiah falls into two major sections like the Old and New Testament. The first section of Isaiah contains 39 chapters, giving the primary theme of coming judgment that anticipated the fulfillment of hope – an interesting parallel to the 39 books in the Old Testament. Isaiah's second section has 27 chapters and announces hope that culminates in Christ and His kingdom, another striking correlation to the 27 books of the New Testament.

Isaiah's content mirrors the gospel truths that the New Testament enlarges and fulfills. He presented God's majestic perfection and rightful position as mankind's judge alongside the people's inability to meet God's righteous standards. Isaiah exalted the promised Messiah as the source of salvation and described the glorious future under His rule as King. The bad news about sin, the good news of salvation, and eternal hope in Christ abound throughout Isaiah.

14: Jesse's stump: Isaiah 11:1

Outline of Isaiah

I. **God's Warnings of Judgment – Isaiah 1–39**
   A. God's Judgment Against Judah and the Hope of Immanuel – 1–12
   B. God's Sovereign Judgment and Hope for the Nations – 13–27
   C. God's Woes and Warnings – 28–39
II. **God's Promises of Hope and Restoration – Isaiah 40–66**
   A. The Deliverance of God's People – 40–48
   B. The Suffering Servant – 49–57
   C. Future Glory – 58–66

Isaiah's Major Themes

Scholars list a variety of major themes that arise within Isaiah, including:

- **God Himself:** Highly exalted above mankind in transcendent splendor, God graciously offers sinners salvation. God's people find their highest purpose in worship and surrender to Him. **A right view of God leads to a right view of self.**
- **The destructiveness of sin:** Rebellion against God leads to emptiness and evil that awaits God's judgment. Isaiah predicted the threat of Assyria (37) and Judah's captivity in Babylon because of sin (39:6-7). **Sin's pervasive damage leaves humanity in desperate need of God's grace and salvation.**
- **The promise of salvation:** Those who trust in God find deliverance from sin's penalty into a present and future life with Him. **Salvation rests solely on God's grace.**
- **The provision of Messiah:** Throughout the book, Isaiah pointed forward to God's fulfillment of His promises in the deliverance of the promised Messiah from the charred stump of Jesse (6:13; 11). He added important prophetic details, including Messiah's virgin birth (7:14); sacrificial death (53); servanthood (52:13–53:12); and promised return (2:1-4; 11:6-9; 60:10-15; among many others throughout the book). **Jesus Christ fulfilled God's promises and met mankind's greatest need.**
- **Hope and comfort:** God's people, from all nations, face a glorious future and experience God's comfort in this life. **Only in God can people find true and enduring hope.**

God gave Isaiah a message for his day and our day. He spoke dire warnings to the people of Judah and offered hope and deliverance if they returned to God. Isaiah's message and mission to Judah echoes with truth and hope for today. As we move into the beauty and challenges within this great book, we trust God to soften our hearts, open our minds, and teach us. "LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done wonderful things, things planned long ago" (Isaiah 25:1).

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

God called Isaiah to speak for Him during a dark period in Judah's history. The northern kingdom of Israel fell to Assyria during Isaiah's ministry. With evil and idolatry increasing through the reign of several kings, God's patience waned. His judgment and the Babylonian captivity loomed near. God called Isaiah to keep delivering a message that would go mostly unheeded. Throughout his long ministry, Isaiah faithfully called God's people to repentance. He repeatedly offered hope of restoration alongside his warnings. Through and beyond this purifying judgment, God would preserve the kingly sprout of David's lineage through the stump of Jesse and uphold His promises of Messiah.

The majestic book of Isaiah falls into two major sections. Chapters 1–39 foretold the coming Babylonian captivity in response to Judah's sins. Chapters 40–66 look prophetically beyond that time with hope of Christ's eternal kingdom that would fulfill God's promises in amazing ways. Isaiah's call to ministry began with an incredible vision of God that surely propelled his message and service to God. Isaiah's role as a prophet could not have been easy. God faithfully continued to warn and woo His people as He demonstrated His compassion for sinners. God's voice cannot be silenced by opposition. He remains faithful to speak even when most people ignore His voice. **We will fly over the grand landscape of the book of Isaiah ready to parachute into specific passages, prepared to learn and grow.** Will you listen for God's voice and experience His comfort?

Apply It

The book of Isaiah clearly displays God's heart for rebellious people. God desires that sinners come to Him. He keeps on speaking, even when people ignore His voice and choose their own way. While the certainty of God's judgment can be difficult to process, the truth of His unrelenting grace helps balance that stark reality. All people are accountable to God and not independent of His rule. However, He also seeks to bring them to Himself. How have you experienced God's relentless pursuit of your heart? When you mess up or stray from Him, how has God drawn you near and called you back? God does not speak once and then remain silent. Every day, the sun rises and sets in a rhythm only He could design. Raindrops fall on believers and unbelievers to soften hardened soil *and* hardened hearts. God's Word speaks and repeats truth that cannot be dismissed no matter how hard people try. God keeps on speaking when we resist Him because He loves us too much to stop. Only He knows when people's hearts go beyond the point of no return. Those who reject Him willingly ignore creation's witness and God's ever-present voice. His warnings display His mercy. **God's continued invitation reveals His merciful heart and the saving grace we so desperately need.**

Do you ever struggle to keep doing the hard thing without visible proof that it is worth it? How do you feel when doing what is right does not produce the results you hoped for? Perhaps the spiritual training you invested in your children has not produced hearts that love and obey God. Maybe you have stayed committed to a challenging marriage that continues to remain difficult. We sometimes read of missionaries who do not see one convert despite faithfully proclaiming the gospel over many years. God intentionally called Isaiah to a mission that He knew would not yield a lot of obvious

results. **Only God can truly measure the fruitfulness of your faithful and costly obedience.** God stays faithful when our obedience remains hard. How willing are you to persevere like Isaiah did? Sink your roots deep into God and gaze firmly on Him.

God pulled back the curtain on His glory to propel Isaiah into fruitful service for His cause. What helps us keep our eyes fixed on God? How can we train our ears to hear Him speak above other noise? Maintaining a proper and constant view of God can be challenging as we navigate the struggles of life. Regular time in God's Word infuses us with daily doses of His divine truth. Turning to Him frequently in prayer reminds us that He knows our needs, controls all things, and longs to help us. Meditation on what is true about God grants perspective when life challenges or discourages us. Thinking about the practical impacts of God's specific attributes, such as His sovereignty, compassion, or righteousness, helps realign our perspective. Today, how will you intentionally "see" God seated on His throne, ruling over your life and the world? **The God whose presence filled and shook the temple still rules the universe.** Psalm 91:1 promises, "Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty." The God who stands above all casts His shadow over you, offering you a place to find refuge and to flourish.

All Scripture quotations in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ® NIV ®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Isaiah Part 2 – Promise of Judgment and Message of Hope

Isaiah 1–39

Lesson Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 18 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the notes about Isaiah's mission and message encourage or challenge you?

2. What specific truth from the lecture broadened your understanding of God or His work?

The first 39 chapters of Isaiah weave together his overarching themes of coming judgment and certain hope. Each day's study highlights one of Isaiah's developing themes with corresponding verses listed in the questions.

Second Day: Read the selected passages from Isaiah 1–39 listed below.

Isaiah called out sin and foretold coming judgment.

3. a. From 1:1-15; 3:1–4:1; and chapters 28–31, summarize Judah's specific sins against God and other people.

© BSF 2022 (This material may be downloaded from mybsf.org and used by BSF class members in connection with their personal BSF class studies. It may not be otherwise reproduced without BSF's written permission.)

b. What was the purifying judgment that awaited God's people (see 1:24-25; 5; 7:18-25; 39:5-7)?

4. Isaiah called Judah to repentance.

   a. List eight admonitions given to these rebellious people from 1:16-17.

   b. How is God's heart toward sinners evident from 1:18-20?

5. Isaiah also enumerated the sins of neighboring nations as well as Israel and Judah in a series of poems recorded in chapters 13–24. Choose one or two nations to read about to gain a sense of God's messages to these nations.

   a. How might these messages to other nations have impacted God's people?

   b. What do these promises reveal about God?

6. How have you experienced God's unconditional love and purifying discipline as His child?

Third Day: Read the selected passages from Isaiah 1–39 listed below.

Isaiah promised the hope of God's coming King and prophesied Messiah.

7. a. Record the promises of the Messiah given and fulfilled in these verses:

   Isaiah 7:14 with Matthew 1:20-23

   Isaiah 9:6-7 with Philippians 2:9-11

Isaiah 11:1-5 with Matthew 3:16-17

Isaiah 11:10 with Romans 15:8-13

b. What truth about Jesus is particularly meaningful to you and why?

Fourth Day: Read the selected passages from Isaiah 1–39 listed below.

Isaiah promised the hope of God's coming kingdom.

8. a. Briefly summarize the promises God gave through Isaiah concerning His coming kingdom.

Isaiah 2:1-5

Isaiah 4:2-6

Isaiah 9:1-3

Isaiah 11:6-9, 12-16

Isaiah 14:1-8

Isaiah 27

b. Why would these promises have given the people of Judah hope as they faced God's judgment?

c. What did you read in these promises that personally gives you hope?

9. How do you seek hope when life is unexpectedly hard?

Fifth Day: Read Isaiah 12 and 25–26.

Isaiah praised the greatness of God.

10. From Isaiah 12:

    a. How does this chapter directly relate to the plight of God's people at this point in their history?

    b. Which phrases or verses offer you direction, courage, or hope?

11. a. What attributes of God stand behind Isaiah's song of praise in chapter 25?

    b. How might these truths about God strengthen you today as you face something uncertain or difficult?

12. What other phrases or truths found in chapters 25 and 26 spoke to you in a specific way?

Sixth Day: Think about the themes of judgment and hope Isaiah expressed in chapters 1–39.

God offers certain hope as judgment draws near.

13. As you ponder Isaiah's message of judgment infused with hope, what stands out to you and why?

No homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders

Lecture Notes

Next step: Read Lesson Notes.

Lesson Notes

Isaiah 1–39

Focus Verse

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." – Isaiah 9:6

Outline

- God's Judgment Against Judah and the Hope of Immanuel – Isaiah 1–12
- God's Sovereign Judgment and Hope for the Nations – Isaiah 13–27
- God's Woes and Warnings – Isaiah 28–39

Engage

God's justice differs entirely from other expressions of judgment within the human realm. God judges with perfect righteousness, complete knowledge, and absolute sovereignty. Human courts render verdicts based on attainable but limited evidence. People form conclusions that inevitably reflect personal bias or preferences in some way. As we study God's judgment on Israel and Judah, we uncover an amazing aspect of God's character. **God enacted His righteous verdict to accomplish a redemptive purpose.** Isaiah's declaration of harsh discipline coming upon God's people resonated with God's invitation to repentance and hope beyond the pain.

Hope and purpose, preceded by God's warnings, propelled His judgment. The seriousness of sin alongside the reality of God's grace stands evident. Even when sin extracts a costly toll, God works to accomplish a grander purpose. Israel's history and human history march forward to God's glorious finale that He will orchestrate with well-timed perfection. **God offers certain hope as judgment draws near.** Isaiah's message speaks powerfully today. God's righteousness, knowledge, and sovereignty remain constantly at work. We hold onto hope while we cling to Christ and walk in this world.

The book of Isaiah falls into two major sections that offer two distinct yet often interwoven themes. Chapters 1–39 deliver the primary message of God's coming judgment against Judah and her neighboring nations. This first section also contains well-placed promises that set up Isaiah's second theme of hope. Chapters 40–66 expand that theme, abounding with words of comfort and hope for Judah's exiles. These chapters explain the necessity of judgment, but also point to the full restoration of God's people in the future reign of Messiah on earth.

God's Judgment Against Judah and the Hope of Immanuel – Isaiah 1–12

The Charges That Bring Judgment – 1–6

In these chapters, Isaiah ushered Jerusalem and Judah into God's courtroom and called creation as a witness to specific charges regarding how they had broken God's covenant. In response to their sin, God would send the purifying fire of judgment in the form of nations that would oppress and conquer them. All this would take place to bring forth God's kingdom – a new day, a new city, a redeemed people who would bless the nations, and a world abounding in peace. This overall message grows in intensity and adds details as the book progresses.

Judah's Prevailing Sins – 1:1-23; 3:1–4:1

Isaiah began his message by listing Judah's specific sins. **Judah's kings and people had rebelled against God and spurned His grace.** In grave unfaithfulness, they broke God's laws, resisted His loving correction, and failed to live rightly as God's covenant people. Wickedness overtook the nation and left their land desolate. Their meaningless worship was detestable to God, who no longer listened to their prayers. Bribery and brutality filled their cities and consumed Judah's leaders.

God's heart for His straying people remained evident. **Amid His indictments, God offered a tender plea for His people to repent.** "'Come now, let us settle the matter,' says the LORD. 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword'" (Isaiah 1:18-20a). God offers undeserved forgiveness when people repent and turn to Him for salvation.

Judah's haughty pride would be cast down as God was about to reverse their fortunes and bring intense suffering. Chapter 3 enumerates the specific sins of Judah's leaders and women. Israel's leaders failed to steward the responsibility entrusted to them by God. As a result, any security found in governmental leadership would disappear. Disaster would strike and bring utter chaos. Judah's women oppressed the poor to live self-indulgent lives of luxury. In return, their excess would be reversed as their men died by the sword. The women would find themselves suffering and destitute.

God's Purifying Judgment – 1:24-31; 5–6

Judah's perpetual disobedience led the way to God's righteous judgment in the form of conquering nations. The ravages of battle would bring intense suffering, with Judah's food and water supplies cut off and her armies destroyed. God lovingly planted and tended Judah as His vineyard. Yet, as a people, they produced only rotten fruit. God would bring devastation and exile upon the people He loved – to judge their sin and purify the nation. "Therefore my people will go into exile for lack of understanding; those of high rank will die of hunger and the common people will be parched with thirst" (Isaiah 5:13).

This devastating judgment displayed the character of the Lord Almighty. "But the LORD Almighty will be exalted by his justice, and the holy God will be proved holy by his righteous acts"

(Isaiah 5:16). Everything God does remains consistent with His unchanging character. The people who "call[ed] evil good and good evil" did and will find themselves held accountable to God Himself. He alone defines what is truly good.

God's purifying grace prepared His humble servant Isaiah to repeatedly declare God's frightening message of coming judgment. Chapter 6, which we studied last week, recounts God's commissioning of His servant Isaiah. The revelation of God's incomprehensible power and authority revealed Isaiah's own need for cleansing as he stepped up to serve as God's spokesman.

Chapter 6 ends with a picture of the burned stump of Israel, a "tenth" – the remnant purified by God through judgment. **The "holy seed" God promised would sprout from this charred stump – the line of Jesse and King David.** Isaiah will enlarge this image in chapter 11. Sin cannot thwart God's redemptive plan.

God's Promised Kingdom – 2; 4:2-6

God threaded His indictments of Judah's sin and promise of judgment with strands of hope; He promised a coming day when sin's damage will cease and righteousness will reign. In chapter 2, sandwiched between harsh declarations of sin and judgment, God gave Isaiah a beautiful picture of restoration for Judah and Jerusalem. "In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it" (Isaiah 2:2). Jerusalem will draw people from around the globe who seek the Lord and desire to walk in His ways. Isaiah's famous words in verse 4 about swords beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks offer hope that sin does not have the final word. God's purposes prevail.

Isaiah 4:2-6 offers yet another glorious picture of the coming reign of the promised Messiah. "In that day the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel" (Isaiah 4:2). This messianic title points to the reign and rule of God's own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.[1] **Isaiah heralded the restoration of purity, shelter, and glory that will rise like a canopy over God's redeemed, repentant people.** Sin's destruction cannot erase the rescue and glorious abundance God has preserved for His own people.

The Deliverance That Brings Hope – 7–12

The Promise of Immanuel – 7:1–9:7

Isaiah recounted his interaction with Judah's wicked King Ahaz[2] during a military threat from King Pekah of Israel (also referred to as Ephraim) and King Rezin of Aram (Syria). **Through Isaiah, God foretold the downfall of Ahaz and promised He would preserve David's royal dynasty and lineage of the promised Messiah.** Isaiah 7:14 records this beautiful and often-quoted messianic prophecy: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." God fulfilled this mysterious promise when the angel announced the birth of God's Son to Mary.[3]

1: The promised Branch: Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15; Zechariah 3:8; 6:12; John 15:4-5
2: King Ahaz: 2 Kings 16; 2 Chronicles 28
3: Immanuel born: Matthew 1:20-23; Luke 2:26-38

Prophecies of Messiah (Jesus Christ) in Isaiah

He will:

1. Be born of a virgin – 7:14 (Matthew 1:20-23)
2. Be a stumbling stone to Israel – 8:14 (1 Peter 2:8)
3. Bring light and joy to Israel – 9:1-2 (Matthew 4:12-16)
4. Govern the world – 9:6 (Philippians 2:9-11)
5. Reign on David's throne – 9:7 (Revelation 19:6)
6. Be descended from Jesse, the father of David – 11:1, 10 (Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-32)
7. Be anointed with the Holy Spirit – 11:2; 42:1 (Matthew 3:16-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22)
8. Judge in righteousness, justice, and faithfulness – 11:3-5; 42:1, 4 (Matthew 12:20-21)
9. Usher in cosmic changes to accompany His judgment of the world – 13:10-11; 34:4 (Matthew 24:29-30)
10. Be announced by a messenger – 40:3-5 (Mark 1:2-3; Luke 3:4-6; John 1:23)
11. Be called before birth to be God's servant – 42:1-4; 49:1 (Matthew 12:15-21; Philippians 2:5-8)
12. Be gentle to the weak – 42:3 (Matthew 12:15, 20)
13. Make a new covenant with Israel – 42:6; 49:8-9 (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 8:8-13)
14. Be a light to the Gentiles – 42:6-7; 49:6 (Romans 15:12)
15. Restore Israel spiritually – 49:5-6; 59:20-21 (Romans 11:26-27)
16. Be worshiped by Gentiles – 49:7; 52:15 (Romans 15:14-21)
17. Be rejected by Israel – 49:7; 53:1, 3 (John 1:11)
18. Voluntarily suffer – 50:6; 53:7-9 (Acts 8:32-33; 1 Peter 2:22-25)
19. Take on Himself the sins of the world – 53:4-6, 10-11 (Matthew 8:17)
20. Triumph over death – 53:10-11 (1 Corinthians 15)
21. Be exalted – 52:13; 53:12 (Luke 22:37; Philippians 2:9)
22. Comfort Israel and bring vengeance on the wicked – 61:1-3 (Luke 4:18-19)

Isaiah's own name and the names of his two sons carried prophetic significance that somewhat summarize the major themes of his prophecy. Isaiah named his first son Shear-Jashub, which means "a remnant will return." His second son was named Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. This long name means "quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil," and it reflected the Assyrian conquest and deportation awaiting the Israelites. Like the names of his sons, Isaiah's messages offered warnings of judgment alongside messages of hope. Isaiah's own name means "the Lord is salvation." Isaiah consistently pointed to the Lord as the source of salvation. Isaiah's life mirrored his message.

God would indeed use Assyria as His instrument to chop Israel down. Even so, God's grand redemptive plan provided hope beyond the despair. **A humbled people would emerge from darkness to the light brought to earth by God's own Son.** "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned" (Isaiah 9:2).

Isaiah's prophecy blends truth about Jesus' first coming as sin's sacrifice with powerful predictions of His second coming, when He will reign. God's prophet proclaimed the hopeful news that a greater King will rule a perfect kingdom.[4] "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this" (Isaiah 9:6-7). Someday the Lord Jesus Christ will reign on earth, but today He reigns in the hearts of those who surrender to Him as their Lord and Savior.

The Defeat of Enemies – 9:8–12:6

Israel would not immediately recognize their conquest by vicious enemy nations as God's plan for their preservation. However, God's purposes would prevail. Assyria would overrun Israel, but Assyria itself would eventually fall under God's judgment because of their pride and evil. The Lord Almighty would use this foreign enemy to bring destruction upon the land and His people, but later return a faithful remnant to rebuild what had been torn apart. **Out of the scorched stump of a defeated nation, a life-giving sprout would burst forth, bringing life and light to the world.** "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him – the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD – and he will delight in the fear of the LORD" (Isaiah 11:1-3a). This promise finds its fulfillment in God's own Son.

A promise about the distant future offered certain hope. God's unchallenged rule through Messiah's reign will give rise to unprecedented joy and prosperity for Judah and the whole world. The God who wrought discipline on His people constantly works to exalt His Son to His deserved place of worship and rule. **With God's anger turned away, His people will thrive under the rule of His Son and sing songs of His praise.** "In that day you will say: 'I will praise you, LORD. Although you were angry with me, your anger has turned away and you have comforted me. Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD, the LORD himself, is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation'" (Isaiah 12:1-2).

4: God's reigning king: Genesis 3:15; 2 Samuel 7:12-16

God's Indescribable Gift – Jesus Christ, Our Savior

The Doctrine of God the Son

God exists in three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. **Isaiah's prophecy highlights the Father's sovereign plan and the Holy Spirit's power at work through the Son.** Jesus Christ – Immanuel – came to earth as a baby born to a virgin.[5] He arrived on a mission of mercy to sacrifice Himself, bringing salvation to sinful people in desperate need of a Savior. Later chapters in Isaiah will unfold the suffering the Father willingly placed upon His own Son to save us.[6]

God spoke through Isaiah clearly to reveal the power and majesty rightfully due Jesus, the promised Messiah. His death was not an accident but fulfilled God's sovereign plan. Jesus walked on earth and died on a cross when He came the first time. Jesus will return to earth to reign and rule in power and glory. The Son of God will judge the world and take those He has redeemed into their eternal home. Countless people from every age and nation will offer endless praise to Jesus, the worthy One. Jesus' costly sacrifice ushered in the path to glory available to all who trust Him for salvation.

People easily set aside God and His Son as irrelevant to modern life. The tangible pleasures and distractions in this world can seem more real than an unseen God. With sin easily dismissed as a reasonable personal freedom, the thought of accountability to God and His Son erodes. Jesus cannot be so easily ignored. Only Jesus provides a solution to human sin and inevitable judgment. **Without Jesus, no true hope exists.** Isaiah said it well, "Stop trusting in mere humans, who have but a breath in their nostrils. Why hold them in esteem?" (Isaiah 2:22).

Those who willingly and humbly turn to Christ for salvation receive life's greatest treasure and eternity's indescribable reward. On Jesus rests God's Spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, and might. Upon the shoulders of God's Son rest all governments, wisdom, and authority. Those who seek Christ find Him to be a Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, and the only Prince of Peace. How have Isaiah's glorious words about Jesus lifted your heart to seek and worship God's Son?

God's Sovereign Judgment and Hope for the Nations – Isaiah 13–27

After the Assyrian empire wreaked havoc on Israel, Babylon would rise to attack Judah and destroy Jerusalem. **Chapters 13–23 present a series of poems that enumerate the sins and record God's judgment on the nations surrounding Judah.** The sins of Babylon, Assyria, Philistia, Moab, Damascus, Cush (Ethiopia), Egypt, Edom, Arabia, and Tyre were exposed, along with punitive words toward certain cities. This prophecy warned Judah that Assyria would fall and that Babylon would rise in its place. The people of Judah in Isaiah's day would have found comfort in God's knowledge and power over the nations that troubled them. All people stand accountable to God, whether they recognize it or not.

5: Jesus' condescension: Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; Philippians 2:5-11
6: The suffering Savior: Isaiah 53

Today, as we look at evil nations and people who seem to wield unchecked destruction, we can find comfort in knowing that God will put an end to all evil in His perfect time. Justice, however, is coming. **Chapters 24–27 offer sweeping promises and praises regarding God's ultimate victory over all evil.** Isaiah's message stretches far beyond his own day.

The earth as we know it will wither and fade, and evildoers will face God as their judge.[7] The Lord Almighty will reign in great glory as evil's destruction ends. Isaiah praised the Lord for this coming eternal victory that will crown God's righteous, unstoppable plan. "LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done wonderful things, things planned long ago" (Isaiah 25:1). God promised to atone for the accumulated guilt of Jacob, God's people, and to remove their sinful record. **Future victory awaits those who turn to God for refuge.**

God's Woes and Warnings – Isaiah 28–39

Messages of Woe – 28–35

This final section of chapters 1–39 repeats Isaiah's theme of impending judgment. **Isaiah offers a series of "woes" – pronouncements of judgment filled with sorrow and grief.** He spoke against the leaders of Judah and Ephraim (Israel) and warned that their glory would fade as their enemies attacked. Following the pattern established in Isaiah's prophecy, God offered the hope of restoration among these heavy statements in chapters 28 and 29. He highlighted the cost of Israel's dependence on Egypt rather than relying on God in chapters 30 and 31. Isaiah again spoke of God's glorious reign over a restored people as another woe sounded against the Assyrians in chapters 32 and 33.

The hard days brought by sin's judgment move history forward toward a glorious future. God will right all wrongs and rule in perfect holiness and unprecedented peace.

There is no question that Isaiah's message of judgment thunders relentlessly through chapters 1–39. Exposing the fullness of God's nature, the bad news of judgment remained infused with good news – all to God's glory! The hard days brought by sin's judgment move history forward toward a glorious future. God will right all wrongs and rule in perfect holiness and unprecedented peace. Chapter 35 echoes with hope, restoration, and joy. "Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert" (Isaiah 35:6). **God brings life from death and beauty out of brokenness.** He describes His coming kingdom: "But only the redeemed will walk there, and those the LORD has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away." (Isaiah 35:9b-10)

The Rise and Fall of Hezekiah – 36–39

A historical interlude included here illustrates the theme of the book. **God first used Assyria, then Babylon to bring corrective judgment upon His idolatrous people.** This section repeats the story of Judah's King Hezekiah recorded in 2 Kings 18–20 and 2 Chronicles 32. With fervent, humble

---

7: The flowers fade: Isaiah 40:6-8

prayer and Isaiah's personal involvement, Hezekiah experienced miraculous deliverance from the Assyrian army and King Sennacherib as well as a life-threatening illness.

Hezekiah later foolishly flaunted Judah's wealth before a visiting Babylonian entourage. Isaiah warned Hezekiah that this very nation would return to plunder the wealth he so proudly displayed. This prophecy proved true over a century later. This major section of Isaiah concludes with a promise of judgment that sets the stage for the expansion of God's message of hope in chapters 40–66. **God offers certain hope as judgment draws near.**

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Isaiah's well-loved book blends hard news and hope with beautiful poetry, frightening warnings, and joyous promises. **The first 39 chapters offer primarily a message of warning to Judah.** First the Assyrians and later the Babylonians would render God's purifying judgment upon His rebellious people. However, woven into and beyond the bad news reverberates a resounding echo of hope that gets louder as Isaiah's message progresses. God always preserves a faithful remnant. God stays connected to His people with a future promise of restoration, both in the near and far term.

The destruction of Israel and Judah actually moved God's redemptive plan forward. A root of hope and life sprouted from the scorched stump of Israel's tree to benefit all mankind. **A "holy seed" – a promised King – would rise from the charred root of Jesse in Judah to gloriously fulfill God's promises.** This perfect King will establish His kingdom where joy and peace will bless the people of the earth. These promises point to Jesus Christ, God's own Son – the promised Messiah and only hope for Israel and humankind.

Isaiah's message mirrors the gospel truth that God calls His children to proclaim. Sin yields dire consequences that require God's just judgment. God sent His Son as the Savior for all who place their faith in Him. God's redeemed people live a blessed life on earth and anticipate a glorious future. God and His plan remain unstoppable. Jesus Christ is the only source of true hope.

Apply It

The unrelenting drumbeat of judgment in Isaiah's writings can be distressing. God's wrath against sin and His commitment to judge those who rebel against Him challenge our thinking. Isaiah's constant infusion of hope, invitations for repentance, and glimpses of future victory provide balance. The seriousness of sin cannot be overstated. God's unwavering holiness and His aversion to evil remain constant. But God's unconditional love for rebellious sinners rises within those truths. He extends mercy as He offers warnings and calls people to Himself. He offers hope of a better day and way to live. **Isaiah's words present a timely message for a world that rejects the concept of sin and the thought of judgment.** This aspect of God's character and actions cannot be ignored. Take your hard questions about the harsh realities of judgment directly to God. Will you ask Him to set your heart at peace and to build understanding and faith within you?

Isaiah described the brutal pain that awaited God's people. While our lives may seem tame by comparison, suffering is a very real part of human life. Scripture calls believers to accept pain joyfully and trust God's higher purposes. We are called to a faith that sees beyond what hurts.[8] This is much easier said than done. How do you hold on to hope when your world crashes in? Does God ask what is impossible? Perhaps Isaiah's example helps us. He simultaneously declared what was hard *and* hopeful. Can you start by confessing whatever you currently find distressing? Then, will you verbalize hopeful truth found in God's Word? Finally, ask the Holy Spirit to bind that stabilizing truth to your heart. **When your emotions or circumstances do not line up with truth, choose truth.** God always works to bring good and accomplish a purpose that brings Him glory. If you cannot explain or do not understand what God is doing with your pain today, fix your eyes on Jesus. How will you trust God with your most difficult challenge today?

Our simple assertion that "Jesus is the answer" can feel trite or sound cliché. While caution may be needed against glibly offering words like this to hurting people, the reality of this truth remains constant. Jesus conquered sin and paid its dreadful penalty for undeserving sinners.[9] Jesus and the Holy Spirit intercede for us with the Father and protect us against Satan's accusations.[10] Jesus gives us the power to live an earthly life that demonstrates His grace and power.[11] One day, every knee will bow before Jesus, and He will permanently put an end to suffering and evil.[12] Jesus will be heaven's focus, as gratitude pours out for all He has done for us.[13] The truth about Jesus offers more than a slogan. **The wonder of God's Son should capture our hearts and orient our lives.** Jesus *is* the answer. Only Jesus is worthy of our worship.

8: Joy in suffering: Psalm 30:5; 2 Corinthians 12:9-10; James 1:2-8; 1 Peter 4:13
9: Jesus paid for sin: Romans 5:8
10: Divine intercession: Luke 22:31-32; Romans 8:26-27
11: An obedient life: Romans 6:17-18
12: Jesus exalted: Isaiah 45:23; Philippians 2:9-11
13: Worshiping Jesus eternally: Revelation 5:9; 7:9-10

All Scripture quotations in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ® NIV ®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Isaiah Part 3 – The Deliverance of God's People

Isaiah 40–48

Lesson Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 19 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the notes help you recognize the relevance of Isaiah's message to your life today?

2. What point from the lecture gave you hope, encouragement, or needed clarity?

Second Day: Read Isaiah 40.

God declared comfort, hope, and deliverance for His exiled people.

3. a. Define the word "comfort." To what ultimate comfort does 40:1-2 point?

© BSF 2022 (This material may be downloaded from mybsf.org and used by BSF class members in connection with their personal BSF class studies. It may not be otherwise reproduced without BSF's written permission.)

b. Why is the only true source of comfort found in God (see Matthew 1:21 and 2 Corinthians 1:3-7)?

c. In what way have you experienced or do you currently need God's comfort in your life?

4. What do you learn about the person of God in the following verses?

   40:1-11

   40:12-26

   40:27-31

5. How do you find God's strength when you feel weak, weary, confused, or discouraged (40:27-31)?

Third Day: Read Isaiah 41:1–44:23.

God declared His superiority over idols and introduced His true Servant.

6. a. Skim Isaiah 41 and 44:6-23 along with Exodus 20:3-6. What do these passages reveal about why idols and idolatry are so offensive to God and damaging to people?

   b. How do people fashion idols today?

7. a. Isaiah 42:1-9 presents the first of four "servant songs." Read this passage alongside Matthew 3:16-17; 12:15-21. Who is the servant of the Lord?

b. What do you learn about His mission and work?

8. Meditate on 43:1-7. How can these verses sustain you when you experience difficulty or distress?

Fourth Day: Read Isaiah 44:24–47:15.

God proved His superiority over idols and revealed His instrument of deliverance.

9. a. Read 44:24–45:6 alongside 2 Chronicles 36:22-23. Who is Cyrus, and why is he significant?

b. What does this prediction reveal about God and human history?

c. How does this impact you personally?

10. a. God used Babylon as an instrument to judge His people but would ultimately judge Babylon as well. From Isaiah 47, what were Babylon's specific sins?

b. Why would God's future judgment of Babylon comfort His own people?

11. All nations and people stand accountable to God. How does this truth impact your thinking?

Fifth Day: Read Isaiah 48.

God remained faithful despite Israel's rebellion.

12. a. Which verses reveal that Israel's stubborn rebellion did not surprise God?

    b. What phrases or descriptions help you better understand God and His heart for rebels?

13. Read verses 16-19.

    a. How do these verses describe God's actions and posture toward His people?

    b. What did God's people forfeit because of their rebellion?

14. When and how has God led you to "what is best for you" and directed you "in the way you should go"?

Sixth Day: Review Isaiah 40–48.

God is trustworthy to save.

15. How has God provided you steadying hope and a deepened awareness of His unwavering love for you?

Passage Discovery (homiletics, word study, etc.) for Group and Administrative Leaders: Isaiah 40–48

Lecture Notes

Next step: Read Lesson Notes.

Lesson Notes

Isaiah 40–48

Focus Verse

"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins." – Isaiah 40:1-2

Outline

- God's Declaration of Deliverance and Judah's Doubt – Isaiah 40
- God's Elaboration of Deliverance and Judah's Rebellion – Isaiah 41–48

Engage

Does God remain trustworthy when our worst fears become a reality? Does He remain trustworthy when our dreams are dashed and our plans are thwarted? What happens when we experience loss or failure? Can we trust God when the painful situation is our own fault? Challenges and circumstances like these often send us reeling. Disappointment and discouragement can tempt us to question God's character. Life's difficulties may lead us to doubt God's ability and desire to help us. **Through Isaiah's inspired words, we encounter a gracious God who readily offered comfort and hope to the deservedly disillusioned people of Judah.**

Throughout Isaiah's first major section (chapters 1–39), God consistently and repeatedly warned Judah of coming judgment. He called His people to seek Him. Judah's failure to turn to God resulted in Jerusalem's destruction and the nation's deportation to Babylon. Isaiah's second division (chapters 40–66) initiates a major shift in his message. Through Isaiah, God spoke comfort to an exiled people shattered by the painful consequences of their own failures. God promised in advance to redeem them. He would do a new thing, despite their persistent rebellion. God's trustworthiness never changes. God's overruling purposes and faithfulness through challenging times demonstrate that, indeed, He can be trusted. **God is trustworthy to save.** God's purposes prevailed through Judah's exile. He can also use your story to showcase His glory.

The book of Isaiah falls into two major sections that take place in distinct historical and geopolitical contexts. Chapters 1–39 address the late eighth century B.C. Assyria destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. and attacked Judah in 701 B.C. Within this historical context, God warned of coming judgment if Judah failed to trust Him in their distress. Chapters 40–66 look at a time 150 years later. Judgment fell upon Judah through the Babylonian exile in 586 B.C. God's proclamations of comfort and hope for His exiled people in these chapters speak into this painful situation.

Many believe Isaiah's disciples preserved his past prophetic words and applied them to their present exilic context. Passages within Isaiah seem to support this view.[1] **Scholars unanimously agree that the book portrays one unified literary and theological message.** God warned Judah of judgment and promised them deliverance.

God's Declaration of Deliverance and Judah's Doubt – Isaiah 40

God's Declaration – 40:1-26

Following the warnings of judgment in Isaiah's first major section, chapter 40 erupts as a beacon of light and a breath of fresh air. God's burdened and weary people received hope. God declared comfort – His comfort – to a bruised and broken people. Multiple facets of God's character and glory jump off the page to remind us that true strength can be found only in Him. **God stands as the central focus in Isaiah's message of comfort.** This amazing chapter introduces and summarizes many of the major themes threaded throughout the remainder of the book.

The majestic hues within God's character leap out of this breathtaking passage. God knew His people had endured great trauma, and He anticipated their doubts and questions. **God reminded His suffering people that He is trustworthy and sovereign to save.** He reassured them of His care and control. Isaiah presents God as the Glorious One, who comforts and forgives. He is the eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing God. Though sovereign over everything and everyone, God also acts with gentleness. No one compares to our incomparable God. Each of God's individual qualities is marvelous on its own. If this is not glorious enough, all of His attributes always remain simultaneously true. These layered and compounding truths about God offer credence to His promises to deliver and restore Judah. The certainty of God's promises rest on the multiplied perfections of His character.

God is Trustworthy to Save – 40:1-11

God's people would surely have questioned God as they suffered exile in a foreign land. Perhaps they assumed that God had forsaken them, or He was not the Lord of history. Isaiah confirmed God's fervent desire to save His people. He personally intervened to accomplish that salvation. **God's ultimate purpose for His people is not ruin, but redemption.** God's way is not the way of death, but of life. No human force or seemingly impossible situation can stop Him.

These verses emphasize speech. The good news of God's salvation must be spoken, proclaimed, and declared. God's words cannot be compared to anything else we know. People are like grass and flowers. They bloom and grow – yet wither and die. However, the everlasting words of the eternal God stand apart. God's Word endures forever. **God's words of deliverance offer the sole source of hope and comfort for a fading, failing, and dying humanity.** In a world where words abound, the lasting beauty and unshakeable truth of God's Word offer the only solid foundation for faith and life.

1: Isaiah's prophecy preserved: Isaiah 8:16; 29:10-12; 30:8-9

God's words and tone dramatically shift from stern and corrective to kind and gentle. No longer referring to Judah as "this people,"[2] He returned to calling them "my people" in Isaiah 40:1. Though God's exiled people were physically removed from Jerusalem, God dignified their true identity by saying, "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem ...." God spoke these comforting words in a straightforward and simple manner. **Isaiah's clear message reveals God's compassionate heart.**

After God declared comfort, He detailed how sinful people receive this comfort. Only in God and His strength can anyone find hope and comfort. No human can save himself. The New Testament confirms the fulfillment of the promise recorded in Isaiah 40:3-5. God sent John the Baptist to prepare the way for God's promised Messiah. **God Himself stepped into human history to save His people.**[3]

God promised that His Deliverer would come in power but also in gentleness. Isaiah described a shepherd who lovingly tends His flock, gathering and carrying young lambs close to His heart.[4] The same God who wields unlimited power tenderly cares for His own people and gives them strength.

God is Sovereign to Save – 40:12-26

God yearns to save His people – but can He? Absolutely! **God not only desires to save; He is able to save.** Judah's exiled people needed assurance that both were true. God conveyed His ability to save through several rhetorical questions. He confirmed His position as Creator and the Ruler of nations. There is none like the Lord, neither in the cosmos nor in history. No one compares to God, but certainly not the gods of Babylon, Judah's captor. God can accomplish whatever He wishes, which includes saving His people.

Isaiah paints a vivid picture of God's might and exalted place above all else. **God holds the oceans in the hollow of His hand and calls the stars by name – He can certainly handle anything on earth.** God's unlimited power and universe-spanning hand not only direct the cosmos, but also reach people.

Judah's Doubt – 40:27-31

Isaiah now addressed the uncertainty of God's exiled people. **Though the people's doubts might have seemed reasonable, their questions were preposterous against the backdrop of God's splendor.** They complained that their circumstances did not matter to God.

Isaiah asked why the people doubted God's care. In verse 27, the Hebrew word *mišpātî* is translated as "my cause." This word appears 43 times in Isaiah and speaks of God's right administration of all matters, especially His care for the oppressed. The root word, *mišpāt,* is most often translated as "justice" – a virtue that flows from God and defines His coming kingdom.[5] God expects His people to uphold justice, even today.[6] **When Judah asserted that God disregarded mišpātî, they directly assaulted His character.** Isaiah answered their question with another one in verse 28: "Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom."

2: "This people": Isaiah 6:9; 8:6
3: Promise fulfilled: Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23
4: Gentle Shepherd: Psalm 23; Matthew 11:28-30
5: Justice in God's kingdom: Isaiah 11:3-4; 16:5; 42:1-4; 51:4-5; 61:8
6: Justice and God's people: Isaiah 1:21; 33:5; 56:1

"Her Sin Has Been Paid For"

The Doctrine of Salvation

Salvation means deliverance from danger, distress, destruction, or harm. This concept incorporates being saved, rescued, preserved, and even victorious. Throughout the Bible, especially the Old Testament, the word "salvation" often depicts deliverance from physical danger. For example, God brought Israel from slavery in Egypt and Judah from exile in Babylon.[7] Ultimately, the Bible's examples of physical deliverance point to humanity's greater need for spiritual rescue. **Salvation, in the spiritual sense, refers to deliverance from sin's penalty, power, and presence.**

Sin represents humanity's greatest crisis. Adam and Eve's first sin corrupted every individual born after them. We enter the world spiritually dead,[8] alienated from God, and unable to accomplish anything of eternal value. Romans 6:23 confirms, "the wages of sin is death." Beyond physical death, sin's penalty also brings spiritual death – permanent separation from God and everything good forever. Thankfully, our gracious God did not abandon us in our sinful, hopeless state. God sent His Son to earth to die the death we deserve. Jesus Christ paid sin's price on our behalf. **All who trust in Jesus are saved from the just penalty their sins deserve.**

This great news only tells half the story. **The believer's salvation includes both deliverance from sin and the gift of Christ's imputed righteousness and eternal life.** Romans 6:23 again confirms, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Though we will all die physically, believers are saved from eternal death to enjoy unbroken fellowship with God now and forever.

Failure to trust in Christ for salvation from sin leaves a person permanently enslaved to sin and guilty before God. Eternal peril awaits all who ignore Christ's invitation to be saved. By amazing contrast, those who put their faith in Jesus' saving work find a secure place of rest for their weary souls. If you trust Christ for salvation, this is what you can know with absolute assurance: Jesus paid in full the penalty your sin deserves. Jesus' overcoming power releases you from sin's stranglehold. You are no longer sin's slave. And one day, you will be permanently set free from any remnant of sin's corruption. Hebrews 2:3 asks a life-changing, eternity-altering question: "How shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation?" **Jesus rescues, preserves, and offers victory to those who trust Him for salvation. What a Savior!**

God never forgets or ignores His people. He does not think like we do. His thoughts and ways are far different from ours.[9] **Though His people grow weary, God never does.** "But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint" (Isaiah 40:31).

7: Deliverance: Exodus 14:13, 30; 15:2; Isaiah 40:1-2
8: Dead in sin: Ephesians 2:1
9: God's thoughts and ways: Isaiah 55:8

God's Elaboration of Deliverance and Judah's Rebellion – Isaiah 41–48

God expanded His declaration of deliverance for His exiled people as Isaiah's writings continue. Having clearly established His desire and ability to save, God now revealed that He not only desired to save Judah *from* something, but *for* something. **God has a purpose for His people.** He longs for His people to declare His glory and goodness to the nations. By grace, God chose Judah – a flawed, failed, and seemingly condemned people – as His servant. At the same time, God promises another servant – His Messiah. This faithful and true witness to humanity will succeed in every way that Judah failed. These chapters continue God's confrontation of His people regarding the idolatry that seduced them. In a startling predictive revelation, God revealed His intended instrument for deliverance – Cyrus, the pagan king of Persia.

God's Servants – 41:1–44:5

God's Promises to His Servants – 41:1–42:17

Isaiah introduced several trial scenes with Judah as his audience.[10] God called Gentile nations and their idols to testify of His superiority. God's ability to declare the future and bring it to pass stood as evidence. **For the first time, God revealed His plan to stir up "one from the east" to subdue kings and turn nations to dust.** The concealed reference to King Cyrus here expands in upcoming chapters. The nations respond with fear and trembling as they turn to each other and their toppling idols for help.

Continuing, Isaiah depicted the nations frantically scrambling to save themselves. Isaiah 41:10 offers a well-loved promise for God's people: "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." God referred to Judah as "my servant" (41:8). Judah enjoyed a special relationship with God, which distinguished her from all other nations. **God now called on Judah as His witness to the nations.** The courtroom scene returns in verses 41:21-29 as God challenged the idols themselves. As Creator of the universe, God predicts His activity in the world in specific detail.

Isaiah offers four servant songs which describe the service, suffering, and exaltation of Jesus, the Lord's servant. This first song, recorded in Isaiah 42:1-9, reveals that Jesus will advance His kingdom on earth with gentleness and justice. He will manifest God's grace and glory in ways previously unknown. Ultimately, God's servant will make His salvation available to all.

Unlike God's flawed servant Judah, this servant of the Lord "will bring justice to the nations." God chose and delights in this servant, who is indwelt by His Spirit. **We know this servant is God's Messiah, Jesus Christ.** The Gospel of Matthew quotes this passage, confirming its prophetic message.[11]

Upon declaration of God's coming Messiah, Isaiah calls the whole earth to sing a new song of praise to the Lord (42:10-17). He extols the powerful and pervasive new work accomplished by God's servant. Jesus Christ will Himself herald a new and glorious future deliverance as He rises on

---

10: Trial scenes: Isaiah 41:1-7, 21-29; 42:18-25; 43:8-13; 44:6-20; 45:20-25
11: Jesus, God's servant: Matthew 12:18-21

behalf of His people at the right time, in the right circumstance, and without difficulty. He cannot be stopped by the power of an enemy or the weakness of His people. This praise song acknowledges that regardless of what we imagine, God is never silent or inactive.

God's Reassurance of Redemption – 42:18–44:5

In contrast to the Lord's servant who "opens eyes that are blind," God now addressed a different servant – one He declares as blind and deaf. Because Judah turned a blind eye to God's law and faithful activity throughout her history, she received God's just judgment through the exile. And yet, God whispered hope to this blind, deaf, and obstinate people.

The promise of redemption ushers in Isaiah 43, another stunning chapter in Isaiah's prophecy. God reminded His people of His loving redemption as they passed through the waters and fires of His judgment. God does not spare His children intense suffering, but promises His abiding presence through their pain. **God's personal, intimate love and care for His own children cannot be overestimated.**

God does not spare His children intense suffering, but promises His abiding presence through their pain. God's personal, intimate love and care for His own children cannot be overestimated.

The words of Isaiah 43:1-2 have comforted God's people throughout the ages. "But now, this is what the Lord says — he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: 'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.'" **God's deliverance may not remove suffering, but His power and provision carry His people through dark times.**

God's Instrument – 44:6–47:15

The Foolishness of Idolatry – 44:6-23

Isaiah again condemned the foolishness of idolatry. He employed sarcasm as he painted a picture of a craftsman who used the same chunk of wood to form an idol and as firewood. The man cooked his food over the fire, then turned to bow in worship to the idol he made with his own hands, out of the same wood. How foolish! Idolatry's deception incorporates far more than physical idols crafted by human hands. Today, people often elevate human ideology to form "gods" of their own making. God alone is worthy of worship.

A King Named Cyrus – 44:24–45:25

God now revealed how His promised redemption would take place. **As predicted by Isaiah, God appointed an earthly king named Cyrus to accomplish His redemptive plan.**[12] Cyrus freed God's exiled people to return to the promised land and restore Jerusalem and the temple. The fact that God named this king long before he was born provides confidence in God's sovereign and purposeful control of history. God does not limit His work to those who fully surrender to Him. He accomplishes His purposes in any way He chooses and through anyone He desires.

12: One from the east: Isaiah 41:2

Judgment on Babylon – Isaiah 46:1–47:15

Through Isaiah, God continually reminded Judah of His enduring love. He recalled, "Listen to me … you whom I have upheld since your birth, and have carried since you were born" (46:3). God revealed Himself as their Sustainer and Rescuer. Idols cannot possibly compare with God, who declares, "I am God, and there is no other" (46:9b). God promised Judah that righteousness was near. He would "grant salvation to Zion, my splendor to Israel" (46:13b).

God held Babylon accountable for her pride, idolatry, violence, and brutality. He exacted justice against Judah's enemies, which provided comfort for His suffering children. All peoples and nations stand accountable to God.

Judah's Rebellion – 48

Tragically, God's people persisted in stubborn rebellion and idol worship. His purifying love refined them in the furnace of affliction. **God's heart yearned to fully accomplish His purposes and fulfill His promises to Judah, despite their rebellion.** Isaiah 48:17-18 captures this well: "This is what the Lord says – your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: 'I am the LORD your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go. If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your well-being like the waves of the sea.'"

Isaiah's writings clearly reveal God's heart for His people. In God's hands, even the painful judgment they endured accomplished His redemptive purposes. God longs to save sinners caught in sin's destructive wake and does what it takes to accomplish His salvation. **God is trustworthy to save.** "The salvation of the righteous comes from the Lord; he is their stronghold in time of trouble" (Psalm 37:39).

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Isaiah spoke a message of comfort and hope to God's people, who had been severely disillusioned by their suffering. With breathtakingly beautiful words, Isaiah 40 points people to God, the only source of true comfort. **The God of all majesty and power offers strength to weary and disillusioned people.** God's ongoing purposes revealed He would raise up a servant – the promised Messiah – to accomplish His plan. A foreordained king named Cyrus would set a remnant of His people free. The nation of Babylon crushed God's people but awaited God's judgment. God's redemptive purposes for His children were not thwarted by their sin. In His just judgment, God's plan prevailed, as it always will.

This section of Isaiah fits beautifully within his recurring themes. The nation God called as His own recklessly pursued sin and idolatry. They failed to repent despite His faithful pursuit of their wandering hearts, so they faced dire consequences. However, God still intended good for His errant people. God promised to keep His Word and bring deliverance through the promised Messiah. His coming kingdom will bring unparalleled joy, fruitfulness, and peace. True comfort cannot depend on our vacillating circumstances. Life is difficult more than it is easy. God Himself offers the only source of true hope. **God's people can truly experience His comfort.**

Apply It

Life often leaves us disillusioned. The optimism of youth often gives way to cynicism. People and relationships disappoint us. Our careers, work, and even our families fail to satisfy our deepest needs for fulfillment. How can we maintain a healthy grip on hope when, so often, life is more difficult and confusing than we expected? The disharmony we experience in the world, and within ourselves, offers an invitation to seek God. **We come prepared to recognize God as our only source of comfort when we fail to find solid ground elsewhere.** Isaiah's words to a disheartened people meet us powerfully today. What current chaos do you face? How is God using your searching for answers to draw you to Himself? Isaiah reminds us that "even youths grow tired and weary." We certainly do, no matter our age or life stage. Only when we hope in the Lord, who never gets weary, can we walk and not faint. Life's storms cannot shake God, our solid rock. What current disappointment is God using to call you to Himself? How will you respond?

Isaiah boldly announced comfort for God's people – something we all long for and seek in many ways. We often try to find peace and calm by relaxing activities that take our minds off what troubles us. **Scripture clearly teaches that true comfort can only be found by resting in the certainty of God Himself.** God's comfort *settles* us. Standing on God's promises and trusting His purposes calms our troubled minds. God's comfort also *strengthens* us. Solid truth about God and His ways comes not only like a warm, cozy blanket, but also as a needed infusion of courage and boldness. The God who redeems and calls His children by name promises His comfort when we must walk through fire and floods. God does not promise to remove the pain. Instead, He gives the strength and endurance that carries us through. What comfort do you need today? *Settling* comfort? *Strengthening* comfort? Will you seek to be upheld by God's righteous right hand? How will you purposefully look to God and trust Him amid your challenge?

God delights to save sinners. He loves to seek and rescue us, even from messes of our own making. Isaiah's name means "God is salvation," and his book repeats that good news again and again. **God not only wants to save us, but also He is the only one able to save us.** Only God's words endure forever. He is the Almighty One who sits enthroned above the earth and before whom we are like grasshoppers. The God who holds the earth's waters in the hollow of His hand extends His mighty hand to you. He calls the weary to come and offers the soul rest only He provides. He brings out the starry host and calls each by name, and He knows *your* name. In what way have you heard God's invitation this week? Your current struggle does not surprise or turn Him away. Your eternal salvation rests in Him, but so does your daily survival. He can save you from your sin and rescue you from a wasted life. The God of all glory shines beams of comfort and purpose into your life today. God wants to help. He wants to save you. And He can!

All Scripture quotations in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ® NIV ®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Isaiah Part 4 – The Suffering Servant and Coming Glory

Isaiah 49–66

Lesson Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 20 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the notes expand your concept of God's comfort? How have you personally experienced His comfort?

2. In what way did the lecture help you better understand God's heart to save?

Isaiah 49–66 affirms promises introduced earlier, emphasizing the coming Messiah and His glorious kingdom.

Second Day: Read Isaiah 49:1–52:12.

Isaiah wrote four Servant Songs that herald God's Messiah (42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13–53:12).

3. Isaiah's first Servant Song introduced the Messiah, God's Servant. What stands out to you in:

   a. Isaiah's second Servant Song – the triumphant mission of God's chosen Servant (49:1-13)?

© BSF 2022 (This material may be downloaded from mybsf.org and used by BSF class members in connection with their personal BSF class studies. It may not be otherwise reproduced without BSF's written permission.)

b. Isaiah's third Servant Song – the contrast between Israel's disobedience and the Servant's obedience (50:4-11)?

4. a. Why would the Messiah's servant role surprise people? What unexpected blessings would His servanthood bring?

b. Why do people generally prefer honor and prestige over servanthood?

5. What was the most meaningful verse you read in these chapters and why?

Third Day: Read Isaiah 52:13–53:12.

Isaiah's fourth and final Servant Song detailed the suffering of God's Servant – Jesus, the Messiah.

6. a. How does 52:13–53:4 describe God's Servant – the Messiah?

b. How did people receive God's Servant?

7. a. Deeply ponder 53:4-7. What words connect Jesus' sacrificial death to you personally?

b. Jesus' intense physical suffering is often difficult to think about. What do these details reveal to you?

8. a. How does 53:7-12 explain what Jesus accomplished (skim Matthew 26:47–28:15 for specific ways this prophecy was fulfilled)?

   b. What do you learn from the fact that God revealed specifics about Jesus' sacrifice centuries before He died?

9. Write a short prayer communicating your thoughts to God as you have considered Isaiah 53.

Fourth Day: Read Isaiah 54–57.

God invites redeemed people to experience true peace in His kingdom.

10. What do you learn about God and His ways in the following verses?

    54:7

    55:1-7

    55:8-13

    57:15

11. a. In what situations have you experienced that God's ways and thoughts are higher than your own?

    b. How does this knowledge help you trust Him in a troubling or uncertain time?

Fifth Day: Skim Isaiah 58–66, focusing on the passages listed in the questions below.

Isaiah's final chapters repeat and tie together his recurrent themes.

12. From Isaiah 58 and 59, list a few phrases that call sinful people to turn to God in repentance?

13. From Isaiah 60–62, pick a specific promise, and tell your group how that certainty gives you hope.

14. a. Read Isaiah 64:8-9, along with Jeremiah 18:1-10 and Romans 9:20-21. What truths about God and people are illustrated in the picture of God as the Potter and people as clay in His hands?

    b. What makes it challenging for you, as clay, to yield to God, the Potter?

15. What repeated themes from Isaiah's entire book are captured in Isaiah 65?

16. Read Isaiah 66:2. How does the truth in this verse speak to you?

Sixth Day: Review Isaiah 49–66.

Jesus came as a suffering Servant and reigns as eternity's King.

17. What stands out to you from the final section of Isaiah? How does this truth impact your thinking and view of God's work in the world?

Passage Discovery (homiletics, word study, etc.) for Group and Administrative Leaders: Isaiah 49–57

Lecture Notes

Next step: Read Lesson Notes.

Lesson Notes

Isaiah 49–66

Focus Verse

"I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness." – Isaiah 61:10a

Outline

- God's Suffering Servant – Isaiah 49–57
- The Glorious Future Awaiting God's People – Isaiah 58–66

Engage

Power, prosperity, and prestige define success in this world. We can think that our personal goals are best realized on a graph that charts progressively and smoothly upward. God does not think like we do. His ways are infinitely higher and dramatically different from ours.[1] We prefer a smooth gondola ride up the rocky mountain of life, yet the course God chooses for us often feels more like a treacherous hike. We are helped to consider the path to glory that God designed for His Son – our Savior. Glory and majesty are rightfully due Jesus, but fulfilling God's plan led Him to a cruel cross. **God's plan to reveal His glory often surprises us.**

Isaiah helps us marvel at the depth of the Father's love and the costliness of His servant Son's sacrifice. His prophetic descriptions of Jesus' willing sacrifice baffle mere human understanding. God did not spare His own Son to redeem mankind.[2] Christ's death in our place offers believers an indescribably glorious future.[3] **Jesus came as a suffering Servant and reigns as eternity's King.** May our love for Jesus grow as we ponder what He did to save us.

Isaiah 1–39 emphasizes God's coming judgment on His people. Chapters 40–66 shift the focus to Israel's future restoration. God's promise of a glorious future offered hope to His people in Isaiah's day. Their great suffering left them disillusioned – doubting God, His power, and His plan. In chapters 40–48, God's certain comfort addressed their doubts but also speaks to us today. **Israel's painful path did not eradicate God's resolute care and purposes for His people.** Isaiah's message in chapters 49–66 affirms and solidifies the promises launched in earlier sections of his book.

Israel failed to honor God and bless the nations as His covenant people. Not one of David's royal descendants adequately fulfilled God's promise. Even King Hezekiah, who did many things well,

---

1: God's higher ways: Isaiah 55:8-9
2: God's Son not spared: Romans 8:32
3: Glorious future: 1 Corinthians 2:8-10

failed to fully execute God's mission.[4] **This final section of Isaiah picks up the story as God carries forward His plan to bless not just Israel, but the world – just as He promised.**

God's Suffering Servant – Isaiah 49–57

The Servant Songs – 49–53

The book of Isaiah heralds God's Messiah – His Servant. Four songs, or poems, describe the mission and exaltation of God's Son – His chosen Servant.

- **The first song in 42:1-9** introduces God's chosen Servant, who will come as a light to the nations. This was covered in Lesson 20.
- **The second song in 49:1-13** explains Messiah's triumphant mission.
- **The third song in 50:4-11** heralds the Servant's obedience in stark contrast to Israel's failures.
- **The fourth song in 52:13–53:12** describes the suffering that God's Servant endured to bring sin's pardon.

Isaiah also presents the nation of Israel as God's servant.[5] **Although Israel came up short in her mission as God's servant, Messiah will fully carry out all God intends.** These well-loved sections of Isaiah offer amazing details about the humble and gentle Servant King.

God will indeed establish His kingdom, but not in a way that the people of Isaiah's day expected. Isaiah identified God's Servant as the promised Messiah who would usher in God's promised kingdom. This Servant – God's "holy seed"[6] – would sprout as a shoot from the stump, or lineage, of Jesse.[7] Powered by the Holy Spirit, He will faithfully bring forth justice and usher in God's promised kingdom.[8] Though destined to reign, God's Servant would suffer greatly. Isaiah's beautiful prophecy points to Jesus Christ. This grand book ends with glorious hope. **God's Servant will accomplish everything God promised with perfection and precision.[9]**

The Second Servant Song: the Servant's Character and Mission – 49:1-13

This Servant Song expands the message Isaiah introduced in 42:1-9. **God's Servant rises like a sharpened arrow hidden in God's quiver.** God will restore the tribes of Jacob and display His splendor as He brings salvation to all peoples. "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth" (49:6). Isaiah 42 and 49 show up again in the New Testament, not just about Jesus, but also referring to people like Paul and Barnabas who shared His gospel.[10]

4: Hezekiah's failure: Isaiah 36–39
5: The servant as Israel: Isaiah 41:8; 44:1-2
6: Holy seed: Isaiah 6:13
7: Stump of Jesse: Isaiah 11:1
8: First Servant Song: Isaiah 42:3
9: Jesus the Servant: Mark 10:45; Acts 3:13
10: Light to Gentiles: Matthew 12:18-21; Acts 13:46-47

The words recorded between this song and the next (49:14-26) remind God's disillusioned people that God had not forsaken them. The beautiful words recorded in 49:15 speak of God's constant watchfulness: "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!" **God's constant care reveals His compassionate heart – He cannot and will not forget you.**

The Third Servant Song: the Servant's Costly Obedience – 50:4-11

God Himself told Isaiah what to say. "The Sovereign LORD has given me a well-instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed" (50:4). **Surely Isaiah's awareness that he delivered God's message, and not his own, helped him stay the course to faithfully complete his mission.**

Isaiah's third Servant Song lauds the uncompromised obedience of the faithful Messiah. Persecuted yet firmly committed to God's cause, the Servant stands in stark contrast to the perpetually disobedient Israelites.[11] Jesus fulfilled these prophetic words centuries later. God's own Son offered His back to be beaten and surrendered His body to untold suffering.[12] He set His face "like a flint" toward costly obedience.[13]

God's Servant willingly endured temporary disgrace, but God's story does not end there. Messiah will indeed suffer, but ultimately He will not be put to shame. **The Father vindicated the Son by raising Him from the dead, proclaiming indisputable victory in the face of apparent defeat.**[14] Jesus' obedience provides life and light to all who put their faith in Him.

The words recorded between this song and next (51:1–52:12) encourage the faithful to be ready to face the coming Lord. **Isaiah called those who have tasted the bitter dregs of God's wrath to awaken and be clothed with strength.** These promises call God's people to shout the good news of this glorious future. George Frideric Handel captured many of Isaiah's glorious passages in his well-loved oratorio we know as "Handel's Messiah." Isaiah 52:7 offers glad tidings that are often sung to God's glory: "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'"

The Fourth Servant Song: the Servant's Suffering and Triumph – 52:13–53:12

Isaiah's fourth and final Servant Song propels his message to a glorious, yet painful crescendo. This passage showcases the Father's love for sinners in a manner that almost takes our breath away. Human words cannot fully contain the mysteries and wonders of Jesus' incarnation and sacrificial death. God remains the indisputable author of salvation, who willingly sent His beloved Son to an agonizing death to save sinners. The clarity of prophetic details within this passage leaves no room to consider Jesus' costly death as an accident. The centrality, depth, and height of this prophecy stand unsurpassed. The only right way to approach this mountain of a passage is with humility, worship, and wonder.

11: Israel in contrast to God's Servant: Isaiah 50:1-3
12: Jesus' willingness to suffer: Matthew 27:30; John 19:1-3; Philippians 2:8
13: Jesus' unflinching obedience: Luke 9:51; Hebrews 12:2-3
14: No ultimate disgrace: Matthew 28:5-7; Romans 4:25; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22

The Startling Suffering of the Servant – 52:13–53:3

We often shrink back from thinking about the excruciating physical suffering Jesus endured. Yet facing the appalling brutality of Jesus' death helps us grasp the depths of sin and the breadth of God's love. **We must never underestimate what our sin cost Jesus.** Jesus endured grueling physical torments that made His physical face unrecognizably disfigured.[15] His marred appearance made onlookers unable to believe He came from royalty, much less from heaven. Isaiah 52:15 links Jesus' torturous death with spiritual cleansing – "… he will sprinkle many nations …."[16] Kings will shut their mouths in silence when Jesus comes again in glory and majesty as King of kings and Lord of lords.[17]

Isaiah described God's Servant as a tender shoot growing from dry ground**. Jesus did not enter humanity in a way that drew human accolades, but instead lived as a suffering and despised man.** Though He was God in human flesh, our Savior walked among people who did not esteem Him.[18] Why did the Servant endure such treatment? Isaiah tells us why as this passage continues.

The Personal Impact of the Servant's Suffering – 53:4-6

Jesus endured suffering that brought blessing to us. With amazingly powerful words, Isaiah invites us to personalize Jesus' brutal death and its victorious results. Jesus took on the pain and suffering that our sin deserved. He bore the full weight of the guilt and consequences of our sin – past, present, and future. Jesus was pierced, crushed, and punished, and through that pain, He brought sinners peace. The painful wounds Jesus suffered offer the spiritual healing we so desperately need. In submission to His Father, Jesus bore our punishment yet was considered scorned and forsaken by God. In every sense, that is true. The Holy Father turned His face away from His own Son while Jesus bore the magnitude of humanity's sin on the cross. Jesus suffered separation from His Father, something He had never previously known. No wonder He cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"[19] as He suffered on our behalf.

Isaiah's strikingly personal section of this sacred song ends with a great confession: "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (53:6). We are sinners *by nature* and *by choice*. **In His death, Jesus bore both our inborn depravity and our personal record of sin.** God made Jesus, who had no sin, to be sin for us.[20] What love! What sacrifice! What a Savior!

The Suffering, Death, and Burial of the Servant – 53:7-9

God's Servant offered no resistance to His tormentors. Like a lamb led to slaughter and a sheep who remains silent while being sheared, Jesus, the Lamb of God,[21] faced His death with dignified submission to His Father's plan. Jesus refused to answer the chief priests, Pilate, and Herod.[22] Despite His innocence, Jesus died bearing the punishment for the transgressions of His people. He was buried in a rich man's grave.[23]

15: Jesus' face: Matthew 27:27-30
16: Jesus' cleansing: Ephesians 5:25-27; Hebrews 10:22; 1 Peter 1:2
17: Jesus exalted: Philippians 2:9-11
18: Jesus rejected: John 1:11; 11:47-50; Acts 4:11; 1 Peter 2:7-8
19: Jesus forsaken: Psalm 22:1; Matthew 27:46
20: Jesus took our sin: Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21
21: Jesus, the Lamb of God: John 1:29, 36; Acts 8:32-33; 1 Peter 1:18-19; Revelation 5:6-8; 7:17; 14:4
22: Jesus' silence: Matthew 27:12-14; Luke 23:8-11; 1 Peter 2:23
23: Jesus' grave: Matthew 27:57-60

The Vindication and Exaltation of the Servant – 53:10-12

The final verses of this inspired song confirm that the Servant's suffering and sacrificial death were entirely within God's sovereign control. "Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer" (53:10). **The cruel scheming of evil men accomplished the eternal plan of Holy God.** While specific people were culpable for their acts against Jesus, His death must also be attributed to the sovereign will of God.[24] Through His death, Jesus satisfied God's righteous requirements, accomplished His will, and reaped a plentiful harvest of souls justified by His sacrifice.

Jesus' followers had no idea how to pull together their concept of the messianic King with the idea of a suffering Servant. However, the messianic King had to be the suffering Servant. **Without the atonement brought by the suffering Servant, no one could enter the kingdom of the messianic King.**

Jesus endured torturous suffering as He died to pay mankind's debt of sin. Even so, today He is seated at the right hand of His Father where He will reign for eternity with power, splendor, and glory.[25] The story does not end with death and suffering, but with resurrection and vindication. The road to glory passes through the cross, but ends in triumph and exaltation. Jesus' path to glory becomes our way to hope as well.[26]

The Servant's Deliverance – 54–57

God's offer of salvation reveals that no one is as generous as God. In a beautiful call to accept the Messiah, this passage paints a picture of God's lavish grace and provision. **Isaiah calls the thirsty to "come to the waters" and invites people to "buy wine and milk without money and without cost" (55:1).**

With ways and thoughts infinitely higher than those of mankind, God calls people to flourish under His tender care. Everything God promised through Isaiah will come to pass. "So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (55:11). God's people will "go out in joy and be led forth in peace" (55:12). The salvation won by the suffering Servant will reach beyond Israel's gathered exiles to the entire world. God's call to the repentant rings out in 57:15: "... I live in a high and holy place, but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit ...." God meets mankind's deepest need. True peace comes only when people are at peace with Him.

The Glorious Future Awaiting God's People – Isaiah 58–66

Isaiah's final chapters gloriously tie together all the themes of his writings.

A Plea to Forsake Sin – 58–59

Isaiah recalled details of Israel's sins and offered yet another call to repent. The emptiness of their religious hypocrisy and failure to keep the Sabbath offended God. Their bloodstained hands

---

24: God's will in Christ's death: Acts 2:23; 4:27-28
25: Jesus in glory: Hebrews 1:3-4
26: Path to glory: Acts 1:9-11, 15-16; 14:22; 2 Corinthians 4:8-10; 12:9-10; Philippians 3:7-12

Righteous Jesus Died on Behalf of Sinners

The Doctrine of Substitution

Jesus' death on behalf of sinners incorporates several important and interrelated doctrinal concepts. Many Scriptures help unfold Christ's multifaceted yet unified accomplishment on behalf of those who put their faith in Him. Passages such as Romans 1:18 and 3:24-25, Hebrews 2:17, and 1 John 2:2 and 4:10 shine a light on the remarkable sacrifice Jesus offered.

- Atonement: Jesus' sacrifice paid for sin that was not His own so He could reconcile sinners to God.
- Propitiation: Jesus absorbed or satisfied God's wrath that was justly directed toward sinners.
- Substitution: He died in the place of sinners – a death He did not deserve.
- Justification: Because of Christ, God declares believers not guilty and righteous before God.

God established the principle of substitution in the sacrificial system He set up for His people. The people's sins were symbolically transferred to animals offered for sacrifice. However, the blood of slain animals looked ahead to the ultimate substitute – Jesus, the Lamb of God. Isaiah's Servant Songs lead us to deeply ponder what Jesus bore on our behalf as our substitute. **Jesus took our place.** He did not deserve to die; we deserved everything Jesus suffered for us. He wore a crown of thorns, a symbol of sin's curse, so we can wear a crown of glory, the crown He deserves.

Failing to personally receive Jesus' sacrifice in your stead means that you will pay the just penalty for your own sin. Without Jesus as your substitute, you remain unreconciled to God with the weight of His wrath resting upon you.[27] Guilty before God, you face Jesus as your righteous Judge, rather than your compassionate Savior.

Reread Isaiah 53. **Recognize that Jesus endured inexpressible suffering for you.** Rejoice at the Father's love that willingly crushed His Son to save you, a desperate sinner. Jesus' death was not a gloomy end to a tragic story, but represents a beautiful new beginning for those who trust Him for salvation. Jesus died, but He also rose. The tragedy of the cross brought the victory of His empty tomb.

revealed their sins against one another. The "arm of the LORD is not too short to save" (59:1), but God's wrath would come like a "pent-up flood" if they refused to repent. God continued His merciful warnings as He called His people to repentance.

A Picture of Coming Glory – 60–62

Darkness and sin never have the final word. God's light and glory await as His people are instructed to arise and look to Him. Isaiah repeats the promises of comfort and hope voiced throughout his message. **God will indeed establish His kingdom to heal the wounds of the brokenhearted and set sin's captives free.** Mourning will be exchanged for joy and a garment of praise will replace a

27: Weight of God's wrath: John 3:36

spirit of despair.[28] God's people will display His splendor to the world. A fully new creation will remove the sting of death and suffering forever. This reversal stands at the core of our future hope. All of God's promises will be fully realized.

A Prayer for Deliverance – 63–64

Isaiah prophesies both God's judgment and His deliverance. Israel, who had turned from God, would acknowledge that only He is their Redeemer. **Isaiah records a prayer for God to save them from their enemies and forgive their sins.** He prays on behalf of the people in 64:8-9: "Yet you, LORD, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand. Do not be angry beyond measure, LORD; do not remember our sins forever. Oh, look on us, we pray, for we are all your people."

A Promise to Make All Things New – 65–66

Rebellious Israel received God's constant invitation to live under His tender care. "All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations – a people who continually provoke me to my very face" (65:2-3a). **Those who reject God will be put to shame, but those who turn to Him will be gloriously restored as His people.**

God will create new heavens and a new earth – a place where their former ways will not be remembered. Isaiah juxtaposes judgment and hope, with incredible promises of joy in the world to come. Though the time of this fulfillment remains in the future, God promised a "new Jerusalem" in His coming kingdom.[29] God's supremacy over the nations, His position as humanity's judge, and His promise to make all things new provided hope in Isaiah's day and speaks encouragement to us today.

Isaiah acted as a *prosecutor* who called out sin. He served as a *proclaimer* of God's grace and forgiveness to those who deserve only His wrath. Isaiah ministered as God's *prophet*, foretelling judgment and restoration as he pointed to the promised Messiah. **Jesus came as a suffering Servant and reigns as eternity's King.** Isaiah left no doubt that God is highly exalted. God alone controls mankind's history and eternity's story. How will you begin to act on Isaiah's vision? After suffering comes glory for those who embrace their need for God and His way of salvation.

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Isaiah's words in chapters 49–66 drive home the messages of his entire book. The beautiful prophecy in Isaiah's Servant Songs points to the Messiah, God's Servant. Jesus Christ fulfilled God's promises and plan in ways that Israel and her kings did not and could not. Most particularly, this section of Isaiah reveals details about Jesus' suffering and sacrificial death to save sinners. As Isaiah's mission and message ends, he sets our hope on God's glorious finale – His eternal kingdom. God's covenant promises await their ultimate and certain fulfillment.

28: Joy instead of mourning: Isaiah 61:1-3
29: Jerusalem renewed: Isaiah 65:17-25

Isaiah spent his life faithfully proclaiming God's message to a generation headed for judgment. God revealed His glory to Isaiah in a grand vision that propelled his long career of faithful service. God led Isaiah to name Israel's sins, call people to repent, warn of judgment, and declare hope through the promised Messiah. The success of Isaiah's ministry cannot be measured by the eventual exile of the people He warned. **Isaiah simply went where God sent Him and said what God told Him to say.**

God positions His people in places and spaces to speak boldly and serve Him faithfully. Believers understand the seriousness of sin, the reality of judgment, and the redemption that can only be found in Christ. God arms every Christian with the hope of the gospel and His unshakeable promises. Like Isaiah, we live among people who will face God as Judge on His terms, not their own. God beckons His people to urgently proclaim His message of salvation and its all-encompassing hope.

God led Isaiah to name Israel's sins, call people to repent, warn of judgment, and declare hope through the promised Messiah. The success of Isaiah's ministry cannot be measured by the eventual exile of the people He warned.

Apply It

How will you process the big book and booming messages of Isaiah? What does it take to truly hear God's voice beyond the facts? Perhaps you were moved to worship by Isaiah's vision of God or his description of Jesus' suffering. Maybe you are in a situation that seems endlessly hopeless and without relief. Trust the Holy Spirit to meet you where you are today. This ancient but well-loved book captures eternal truth in beautiful words. Isaiah's writings reveal God's heart and purposes for mankind. Do you need hope? Find comfort in God's promises. Do you need to repent of specific sin? Trust the God who promises to cleanse you and give your life purpose. Ask God to reveal the most pressing truth He wants you to hear from this glorious book. Think about that deeply. What does God want you to do or say in response? **The God who powerfully spoke through Isaiah still speaks.** He speaks to you today.

We don't like failure. We want our team to win, our kids to excel, and our jobs to go well. What happens when things do not go as we desire? God's people failed to live as His covenant people. Isaiah's faithful proclamation of God's message did not turn Judah back from exile. Isaiah's mission would not have produced graphs, charts, and spreadsheets with an impressive bottom line. There is good news – God does not measure success like we do. Isaiah faithfully warned the unfaithful. He declared God as a promise-keeper. **The glaring failure of God's people cannot stop the eternal plan of God.** The promised Messiah, though utterly rejected and killed by the people He came to save, fully accomplished God's eternal plan of redemption. God's kingdom and eternal rule remains entirely certain. In what areas of your life and community do visible results seem dismal? How will you trust God's unseen work? Will you believe that God is doing something bigger and better than you imagine? How will you live in light of the certain hope to come? Whatever befalls us now cannot be compared with the glory to come.[30]

Isaiah's name means "The Lord is salvation," and his book repeats that theme again and again. We can speak so familiarly of Jesus and the gospel that the shocking truth of what He did for us becomes commonplace. We do well to ponder regularly all that Jesus accomplished for us. Mere mortals with

30: Coming glory: Romans 8:18

a tiny fistful of perceived power forced nails through the human hands of God's Son, who willingly surrendered to their death blows. The exalted King of heaven was beaten, bruised, and forsaken. The Father sent His Son to the cross and intentionally laid our sin upon Him. Jesus was not a victim of Jewish hatred or Roman power, but a willing sacrifice for sinners**. No one will ever love you the way Jesus does.** Our hearts should regularly explode in worship as we think about what we deserve and what Jesus did. Praise for the Savior who bore our griefs and carried our sorrows will perpetually echo throughout eternity. "At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10-11). What fresh surrender and worship will you offer Him today?

All Scripture quotations in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ® NIV ®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

God's Handiwork in the Hard Seasons of Life

Various Scriptures

Lesson Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 21 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. As you read the notes and pondered God's message through Isaiah, how did God speak to you? What does God want you to do or say in response?

2. How did the lecture help you focus on the wonder of what Jesus, God's Servant, did for you?

Second Day: Read Isaiah 26:16 and 43:2 along with the Scripture passages listed in the questions below.

God's judgment on Israel and Judah brought intense suffering.

3. Read 2 Kings 21:12-15 along with the passages below and record how and why God's judgment fell on Israel and Judah.

   Israel – 2 Kings 17:1-23

   Judah – 2 Kings 25:1-21

© BSF 2022 (This material may be downloaded from mybsf.org and used by BSF class members in connection with their personal BSF class studies. It may not be otherwise reproduced without BSF's written permission.)

4. a. How did God's purposes for humanity prevail, despite the failures of His chosen people (see Isaiah 9:1-7)?

   b. In what ways do you see God's grace and sovereignty through the painful judgment He brought on His people?

5. a. As you consider Israel and Judah's brutal suffering, what questions arise?

   b. What truths about God stand out to you in these passages? How do these truths bring perspective to any struggle you feel?

Third Day: Read Genesis 3:19; Job 5:7; and Psalm 109:21-22 along with the Scripture passages listed in the questions below.

Life in this world regularly involves suffering.

6. a. In what ways does Genesis 3:19 relate to the suffering in the world (see Romans 8:18-23)?

   b. How might you explain specific human suffering (see Job 1:9-12; Joel 2:12-14; John 9:1-3)?

   c. What cautions should be considered before assigning blame or reasons for our suffering and that of others (see Isaiah 55:8-9)?

7. Read Isaiah 45:7 with Isaiah 41:10 and 2 Corinthians 11:23–12:10. How does the truth of God's sovereignty provide comfort during times of suffering?

8. How and why does abundant suffering in this life help you long for something better (see 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 and Revelation 22:1-5)?

Fourth Day: Read Isaiah 43:19 along with the Scripture passages listed in the questions below.

Suffering sensitizes us to God and His work in our lives.

9. a. How and why does personal suffering help you seek God?

   b. In what ways has God used difficulty to draw you to Himself?

   c. How have you been impacted by someone else who endured suffering with great faith?

10. Read the verses below and record different ways God works to draw us to Himself through challenges.

    Numbers 32:23

    Psalm 40:17

    Psalm 118:13-14

    Jeremiah 9:7; Zechariah 13:9

11. a. Why do we resist admitting our own frailty and neediness?

b. Read 2 Corinthians 12:10. How have you experienced God's work through your weakness?

Fifth Day: Read Psalm 46 and Lamentations 3:22-23 along with the Scripture passages listed in the questions below.

Our suffering is not wasted when we seek God and His higher purposes through our pain.

12. Read Isaiah 53:4-6, 11-13. What greater good did God accomplish through Jesus' suffering?

13. What verse in Psalm 46 do you find particularly meaningful to you? Why?

14. a. How does personal suffering contribute to your spiritual growth (see Romans 5:3-5 and James 1:2-4)?

    b. Beyond personal growth, what other benefits can suffering bring (see 2 Corinthians 1:3-7 and 1 Peter 4:12-14)?

15. What higher purpose might God be achieving in the biggest challenge you face today?

Sixth Day: Review the thoughts and Scripture passages included in the questions above.

God can be trusted to accomplish His purposes through our pain.

16. What truth about God, human suffering, or personal suffering gives you needed hope today?

No homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders

Lecture Notes

Next step: Read Lesson Notes.

Lesson Notes

Various Scriptures

Focus Verse

"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze." – Isaiah 43:2

Outline

- Life's Hurts
- God's Hope

Engage

Life seems "right" to us when things feel easy. We yearn for happy days and comfortable ways to dominate our lives. Perhaps this internal longing for perfection is rooted in our God-given desire for what only He can provide. **Life is often harder than we expect, and certainly more difficult than we prefer.** Our challenges come in a steady stream and from many sources. Life in a fallen world brings sickness and suffering. Our own sins and those of others complicate our lives. We face political unrest, relational conflict, and the constancy of change. How do we face the questions that arise within us? Where is God in all of this? What does it mean to follow God amid fallenness and dysfunction? Why does God use what hurts to reveal what matters? How does pain accomplish God's purposes in our lives? Isn't there a better way – or at least an *easier* one?

God's purifying purposes for Israel and Judah took them into foreign exile. The Assyrians attacked the northern kingdom of Israel and hauled away the people. The southern kingdom of Judah faced a similar fate when attacked by the Babylonians. Certainly, God's covenant people failed to honor God and live as He intended. Yet, at this point in the story, we witness God's chosen people headed into deep suffering by His design. How do we hold onto hope when our world crumbles? Our faith in God needs to go beyond glib clichés and easy answers. Our real lives offer an opportunity to trust God in specific, personal ways. **God can be trusted to accomplish His purposes through our pain.** Will you seek God's hope in life's challenges today?

Life's Hurts

"But you, Sovereign Lord, help me for your name's sake; out of the goodness of your love, deliver me. For I am poor and needy, and my heart is wounded within me." – Psalm 109:21-22

Life's hard places expose our neediness as we exhaust our solutions and realize how little we control. We often pray for the prompt removal of pain. We resist acknowledging our wounds and accepting

our weakness. Sometimes we are slow to accept the world's fallenness or think we should be spared from its harm. However, God's deep redemptive work through painful situations should not surprise us. **When life is difficult, we become much more likely to turn to God.**

As we seek God's help, we learn to trust Him and rest in His sovereignty. God has higher and holier goals than our perceived comfort. His faithfulness cannot be equated with the removal of pain or clearing of obstacles. No matter the source or outcome in life's hurts, God remains trustworthy. **Even if we never understand God's ultimate purposes in our hardships, we can trust Him.**

God's Painful, Purifying Plan for Israel and Judah

Humbled by God's Discipline

"LORD, they came to you in their distress; when you disciplined them, they could barely whisper a prayer." – Isaiah 26:16

The nation of Israel divided into two kingdoms and progressively turned away from God to worship idols. God sent many messengers who offered His persistent plea for His covenant people to turn back to Him. **The continuous rebellion that led to God's inevitable judgment overshadowed the bright spots in Israel's story.**

Two things remain true about the intense suffering God orchestrated for His people. First, their suffering in exile came as God's judgment on their national rebellion and sin. Despite receiving God's promises and blessings, Israel turned away from God.[1] However, a second comforting yet perplexing truth arises: **God intentionally brought painful judgment on His people to accomplish a greater good.** The faithful suffered alongside the unfaithful.

Purified Through Suffering

"'I have revealed and saved and proclaimed – I, and not some foreign god among you. You are my witnesses,' declares the LORD, 'that I am God.'" – Isaiah 43:12

God's sovereign plan did not fail when foreigners overtook the promised land and deported God's people. After the exile, God dispatched a faithful remnant to return and rebuild Jerusalem.[2] Ultimately, God's people await a glorious future where sin and sorrow cease and He reigns forever.[3]

God's redemptive purposes cannot be thwarted. Israel's painful exile finally eradicated her overt idolatry. Even as His people languished, God preserved David's royal line awaiting His promised Messiah. God's people would again fail when they rejected Jesus, who God sent to save them. Israel's denial of God's Son did not deter God's greater good. As we learned in Isaiah 53:10, Jesus died as God's gracious sacrifice to redeem sinners. Evil men drove the nails into Jesus' hands, but God sent Him to the cross to fulfill His plan of salvation. God's promises to Israel stand. He actively works to carry out His good and perfect will.

1: Israel's privileges: Romans 2:17–3:2
2: Remnant returns: Ezra 2–3; Nehemiah 2:11-16; Isaiah 51:11
3: God's eternal kingdom: Isaiah 60; 65:17-25; Revelation 22:1-5

While the Wind Was Blowing

"For the eternal substance of a thing never lies in the thing itself, but in the quality of our reaction toward it. If in hard times we are kept from resentment held in silence, and filled with inward sweetness, that is what matters. The event that distressed us will pass from memory as a wind that passes and is gone, but what we were while the wind was blowing has eternal consequences."[a]
– A. Wetherell Johnson, founder of BSF

The Reality of Suffering in Our Lives

Israel's story offers us hope when God's path for our lives involves pain. **God's purifying, purposeful work envelops everything He allows in all circumstances we face.** While this may not make our troubles hurt less, a proper perspective helps carry us through.

Sin's Curse and Human Suffering

"By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return." – Genesis 3:19

"Yet man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward." – Job 5:7

The relationship between God, sin, and suffering challenges us. The thought that God inflicted harsh and devastating judgment upon Israel and Judah can be troubling. Many people question why a loving God would allow evil and pain to enter the world. Trouble and hardships fill the daily news as well as our day-to-day lives. Our entry into this world and exit from it both involve pain, as do countless moments in between. How can we explain global disasters, internal conflict, and the pervasive presence of heartache in our world?

Sin entered the world through Adam and Eve, shattering the perfection of God's creation.[4] Sin's damage makes disease, death, and disaster a regular part of our daily lives.[5] Difficulty now characterizes our lives in this fallen world. God uses suffering to discipline us but also to refine us. **While the general cause of worldwide suffering remains clear, not all suffering directly results from personal sin.** Seeking God and self-examination help when we suffer; we can trust God to reveal if our current difficulty is tied to a specific sin. We are not, however, equipped to understand or explain what only God knows about the suffering of others.

The Suffering of God's People

"See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this. How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield my glory to another." – Isaiah 48:10-11

4: Sin's entrance: Genesis 3:1-13
5: Sin's curse: Genesis 3:14-19; Romans 3:9-18; 5:12; 8:20
a: Johnson, A. Wetherell. *Created for Commitment.* Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1982.

Following Christ does not guarantee a pass to an easy life. Believers and unbelievers alike experience hardship. In addition, God's people can endure suffering specifically because of their faith in Christ. The ongoing challenge to resist sin in the Holy Spirit's power represents a purifying but constant battle for a Christian. Also, people who follow Jesus often experience rejection and persecution, just as He did.[6] Believers often suffer for doing right. Those who follow Christ breathe a different air, so to speak. The very way God's children live confounds nonbelievers. Yielding to Christ in daily life creates both internal and external friction.

Believers face specific suffering but also experience stabilizing comfort this world cannot comprehend. Every season of distress brings an opportunity to experience God's strength alongside our fragility. **God works through a believer's suffering whether that hardship comes as God's loving discipline, Satan's opposition,[7] or merely from living in a fallen world.** Spiritual maturity comes not through striving to grow, but as we experience our weakness and God's unwavering strength.

The Example of Jesus through His Suffering

"He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem." – Isaiah 53:3

Focusing on Christ Himself provides the most pivotal comfort when processing human suffering. God did not shield His sinless Son from agonizing heartache or this world's pain.[8] Jesus walked the earth clothed in human skin. He experienced hunger, thirst, temptation, abandonment, and exhaustion. Jesus wept beside a friend's grave.[9] Jesus felt pain so intense that He sweated drops of blood.[10]

Believers face specific suffering, but also experience stabilizing comfort this world cannot comprehend. Every season of distress brings an opportunity to experience God's strength alongside our fragility.

Jesus suffered greatly and secured an eventual and eternal end to His children's pain. He steadfastly embraced the agony of the cross, committed to carry out His Father's will and redeem people caught in sin. Jesus' example helps believers understand how God's power, presence, and purpose can permeate pain. To remain faithful through suffering is to exemplify Christ.

The Truth that Stabilizes Us in Suffering

"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble." – Psalm 46:1

Believers experience a deep and eternal union with Christ that cannot be broken by anything on earth. Romans 8:38-39 powerfully captures this truth: "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

6: Sharing Jesus' suffering: Romans 8:17; Philippians 3:10
7: Satan's opposition: 1 Peter 5:8
8: God's Son not spared: Romans 8:32
9: Jesus' experiences: Matthew 4:1-2, 11; 8:24; John 11:33-35
10: Drops of blood: Luke 22:44

Trusting God Despite the Pain

The Doctrine of Suffering

No one on earth escapes emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual strain. Every age and life stage brings change and challenges. Sin corrupted Eden's perfection and Adam and Eve's pure communion with God. Since then, very little about human life has been easy or harmonious. People toil to earn a living, raise families, and find purpose. Most people endure suffering with little sense of its benefit.

God offers something better than merely plodding through life trying to distract ourselves from what hurts. While God never causes evil, no suffering occurs outside of His sovereign rule. We accept God's absolute control over sunshine and happiness more easily than His purposes in our suffering. God is not only sovereign – He is also good. The fact that we experience hard times cannot mean that God does not love us. The truth that God sacrificed His Son on our behalf demonstrates His love for us. Jesus' suffering through His earthly life and cruel death proves that God's goodness and human suffering are not at odds. Suffering invites people to turn to God and experience His compassion, love, and faithfulness. **Even if the reasons for our suffering remain mysteriously hidden, God works through our struggles to develop our character and call us to Himself.**[11]

We can waste our suffering when we fail to yield to God's purposes in it. The very things God intends to soften our hearts can harden us when we fail to seek Him. Without faith in God, anger, bitterness, frustration, and resignation become our only alternatives. We can wrongly assume that God remains either uninvolved, uninterested, or even mean-spirited regarding our pain. Pain seems pointless without a sense of God's unconditional love, constant presence, and redeeming power. Unless you turn to God, you limit your source of hope in this world, which is full of trouble.

This earth's temporary pain can bring long-term gain. Walking through hardship requires honest wrestling with our doubts and constant dependence on God to stand firm. How would a watching world know that hope is found in God alone if our lives were always easy? Nothing this world offers or can take away compares to trusting the Lord. What is your biggest challenge today? Do you seek to merely escape the misery? What is God teaching you about yourself and His sustaining grace? God can be trusted with anything and everything we face in this life. Untested faith is unproven faith.[12] Your troubles and trials allow you to experience God's faithfulness. No matter what happens in your life, nothing is sweeter than depending on God.

11: Hidden reasons for suffering: Job 1:6-12; Romans 8:18-39; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18
12: Genuine faith: 1 Peter 1:3-7

A deliberate focus on God puts life's struggles into proper perspective. So many truths about God help us when life overwhelms us. God acts in mercy and compassion to His children.[13] Nothing and no one in this world is stronger than God. Yet, He understands human weakness and longs to pour His strength into the needy.[14] God hears us when we cry out to Him. He acts on our behalf and sometimes even answers the prayers we do not have the strength to voice.[15] Our heavenly Father accomplishes His beautiful work in our lives through our pain.

God sees what we do not, understands what we cannot, and accomplishes what we will not. Psalm 61:2 instructs us to cry out to God when our hearts grow faint, asking Him to "lead me to the rock that is higher than I." Only God never changes. He alone provides the unshakable foundation in the storms of life.

God's Hope

"Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." – Lamentations 3:22-23

Hope comes when we place our eyes on God, not our circumstances. Suffering does not defeat God's people or negate God's promises. God accomplished His plans for Israel and Judah through a painful path they would never have chosen, and God will fully complete His work in you.[16] **In any given moment, all of God's power, purposes, and presence are fully at work – never hindered in any way.**

Suffering Accomplishes God's Purposes

"See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland." – Isaiah 43:19

Hard Times Wean Us From Self-Reliance

As sinners, we default to self-sufficiency. **Often, we do not depend on God until we need to depend on Him.** When human options fail, we find ourselves ready to turn to God. A depleted bank account, weary body, confused mind, or desperate moment offer a direct invitation to recognize how much we need God. We are equally needy in our self-confident moments as we are on days when trials leave us barely able to breathe. Hard times help us recognize what is true every minute. While tranquil moments feel more secure than the tumultuous ones, God fully upholds us on every kind of day. Our next breath always depends on Him. Isaiah urges us, "Stop trusting in mere humans, who have but a breath in their nostrils ..." (Isaiah 2:22). Do you consider yourself privileged when God exposes your deep need for Him in practical situations? Difficulty brings us to a place of vulnerability and longing that God uses to turn our hearts to Him.

Our inborn independence means that we must learn to depend on God. How do we do that? Our faith grows when we trust God with our needs as we walk through difficult situations. The

---

13: God's compassion: Isaiah 30:18; Joel 2:13
14: Strength for the needy: Psalm 9:18; 40:17; 70:5; Isaiah 29:19; 40:3-31
15: God hears: Psalm 5:3; 6:9; Matthew 7:7-11; John 16:24
16: God's work: John 5:17; Philippians 1:6

cycle of coming to the end of ourselves, crying out to God, and finding Him faithful builds spiritual muscle. God longs to help us. 2 Chronicles 16:9a says, "For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him." We walk by faith one step at a time.

Hard Times Help Us Grow Spiritually

In God's hands, pain's purifying work bears beautiful fruit. Desperate situations help us recognize what really matters. God reveals what we trust *more than Him* – or fear *in spite of Him*. Through hard times, God calls us to courageous faith. If we never suffered, we might never know the life-giving depths of true dependence on Him. Confidence in God seems easy with healthy finances and a thriving family. However, painfully powerful lessons emerge when we believe God and His Word when our health fails and earthly security vanishes. God remains completely trustworthy and exceedingly faithful.

When have you grown the most spiritually? Most Christians recount how a particularly challenging season stimulated spiritual growth in their lives. Trials sensitize us to God's work. Without difficulties, we would not depend on God as we should. God knows exactly what we need for our faith to deepen. In life's hardships, we discover that we are needy children who can run expectantly to our faithful Father.[17] **God uses trials for our good and His glory.**

Hard Times Prepare Us to Comfort Others

People who have persevered in faith through trials have something worth sharing with others. This result may not seem worth it in times of extreme pain. But God's comfort exceeds anything that this world offers. When you walk through a valley and experience God as your Shepherd, you emerge equipped to proclaim His sustaining grace. God's gentle guidance and powerful presence through intense pain allow you to personally experience how God loves you. **When your faith moves from an idea to an experience, you learn something about God that other people need to hear.**

The realities of suffering prepare you to understand the emotions and struggles others experience. Even Jesus, in all His perfection, became our faithful High Priest who could relate to our trouble because of what He suffered.[18] **God's comfort prepares His people to share His comfort with others.**[19]

Suffering Allows Us to Experience God's Presence

"My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life." – Psalm 119:50

Hard Times Prove God Is Faithful

Our struggles showcase what is true about God. His promises read nicely when life runs smoothly. The same truths become the very air we breathe in times of struggle. **When we suffer, God allows us to experience His nearness in very real ways.** We can freely take our pain to God. When we cannot

---

17: Growth through suffering: Romans 5:3-5; James 1:2-4
18: Jesus our High Priest: Hebrews 4:14-16
19: Comforting others: 2 Corinthians 1:3-7

even voice words in prayer, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with groans too deep for words.[20] Our weakness and neediness may shock us – but never surprise God.[21] He stands ready to help and poised to strengthen us, according to His Word.

The God who created and rules the world involves Himself in our heartaches. He knows when, what, and why we suffer. Our hardship often feels like more than we can bear, but we will never face anything that escapes God's tender care. God may not remove the pain, but He longs to carry us through it. He determines the way that is best for us – and that matters more than the outcome we desire. Our suffering Savior understands our sorrows. Our Almighty God is our ever-present help in times of trouble.[22]

Hard Times Help Us Long for Future Deliverance

If this world were comfortable, we would not long for heaven. **Our ongoing battle with sin's carnage helps us realize that this world is not our home.** We are created in God's image – suited for Eden and heaven, not the pain of this fallen world. God has something so much better for us. The anguish, sickness, and death common to mankind will one day be abolished. God's people will gather around His throne to sing His praises forever. 2 Corinthians 4:17 promises that our "light and momentary troubles" will bring "an eternal glory that far outweighs them all."

At the end of life's journey, believers will see Jesus face-to-face. The sinless One who bears our scars understands our pain. God's own Son died a painful death to end our struggles. For all eternity, redeemed people will offer untainted praise to the Savior who set them free from sin's sorrow. Earth's hurts are real, but God's victory remains sure. **God can be trusted to accomplish His purposes through our pain.**

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

God sent the people of Israel and Judah into an intensely harrowing exile as an act of His judgment. He allowed them to suffer the brutal onslaught of conquering enemies and to be uprooted from their homeland in disgrace. However, God purified and preserved His people beyond their years of exile. Human wisdom questions God's ways of accomplishing His redemptive plan. However, this torturous judgment revealed God's sovereignty, upheld His purposes, and displayed His glory. **The purposeful suffering of God's covenant people helps believers today who endure life's struggles.**

Believers sometimes expect life to be easy and seem surprised by trials. While we resist suffering, God uses our pain in powerful ways. Through hard times, we learn to seek and depend on God. We stand ready to see God work when human solutions flounder and our sensitized hearts turn to Him. God remains ready to help us walk on in faith, relying on His strength. **We may never fully understand all God's intent as we suffer, but He is worthy of our trust.**

20: Holy Spirit prays: Romans 8:26-28
21: God knows our weakness: Psalm 103:13-16
22: Ever-present help: Psalm 46:1

Apply It

The question that most often rises as we suffer is "why?" We observe loved ones suffering chronic physical torment. Our own trials rarely resolve on a schedule we would choose. We wonder what God is doing and why we deserve such trauma. God clearly told the people of Israel and Judah that His judgment brought their exile. We cannot always draw such certain conclusions. We also ask another question – "how long?" We long for pain to end as quickly as possible. Only God can truly answer our deepest questions. **God calls us to trust His higher purposes that we cannot fully discern.** What hard question are you asking that only God can answer? If God enlarges your understanding, praise Him! If God calls you to keep trusting Him with answers He does not provide, praise Him still! God will not extend earth's agony one second beyond completion of His greater purposes. Pour out your heart to God and trust His infinite knowledge as your solid foundation.

How do we face the perpetual reality of trials without becoming bitter or depressed? Life certainly has bright moments but seems more often hard than easy. Some days we revel in life's goodness. Other times seem unrelentingly heavy. How do we reconcile a realistic expectation of rigorous uphill climbs with our need for ease and reprieve? **We will never find the stability we long for if we depend on circumstances to dictate our joy.** We cannot expect every day to feel amazing. God wired your personality and emotions. He knows when you benefit from purposeful strain designed to accomplish His intended gain. God knows when you need reprieve and what puts wind in your sails. Ultimately, He calls us to meet each day ready to receive His fresh and timely supply of gentle mercy and sustaining grace. What do you face today? No matter what your day holds, will you deliberately look for God's kindness? How might you fix your eyes on God rather than what you cannot control?

Earthly pains will not last forever. We awoke this morning one day closer to either Jesus' return or the end of our lives. This world's pleasures offer passing comfort. Yet God has exponentially more for us than the bricks, money, power, and prestige of this world. One by one, our loved ones leave this earth and so will we. How has either the pain or pleasure on this revolving planet blinded you to what matters most? Only God knows you completely. Only God can rescue you from sin's penalty. Only God will forever eradicate the hurts we face here on earth. **At the end of the day, God rises as our only hope; at the end of our lives, He is all that matters.** How does God – and the deliverance Christ accomplished on your behalf – help you look beyond life's struggles and see Him? Romans 15:13 says, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Amen!

All Scripture quotations in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ® NIV ®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Micah – God's Justice and Mercy as Our Standard

Micah

Lesson Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 22 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What specific comfort about God and His higher ways did you receive from the lecture?

2. How did the notes offer you hope to navigate life and your current challenges?

Second Day: Read Micah 1–2.

Micah denounced Israel and Judah's sins against God and man.

3. Name the kings who received God's prophecy through Micah. What cities did Micah's vision concern?

© BSF 2022 (This material may be downloaded from mybsf.org and used by BSF class members in connection with their personal BSF class studies. It may not be otherwise reproduced without BSF's written permission.)

4. a. What specific sins did Micah denounce in the following verses?

   Micah 1:1-7

   Micah 2:1-5

   Micah 2:6-11

   b. How do wrong desires escalate into outright acts of sin like those listed above (see Matthew 15:18-20 and James 1:14-15)?

   c. Consider Israel and Judah's sins and God's response. What lessons can you draw about your own battle with sin?

5. Read Micah 2:12-13. What encouraging promise and warning did Micah proclaim?

Third Day: Read Micah 3.

Micah rebuked Israel's and Judah's corrupt leaders.

6. Summarize the sins of Israel and Judah's leaders and God's response in the following verses.

   Micah 3:1-4

   Micah 3:5-7

   Micah 3:9-12

7. Should leaders be held to a higher standard and answer for the way they lead? Why or why not (see Titus 2:7 and James 3:1)?

8. a. Read Micah 3:8. How did Micah's leadership as God's prophet differ from the other leaders?

b. In what roles or places has God strategically placed you to stand with Him and to do what is right?

Fourth Day: Read Micah 4–5.

Micah proclaimed God's coming King and kingdom.

9. Read Micah 4:1-8. What is most marvelous to you about God's coming kingdom?

10. a. Read Micah 5:2-4 alongside Matthew 2:1-12. Who is God's chosen King?

    b. What do you learn about Him from Micah 5:2-4?

11. How does hope in the returning King and His coming kingdom impact your life today?

Fifth Day: Micah 6–7.

Micah lamented Israel's and Judah's sin and judgment and recalled God's mercy.

12. a. From Micah 6:1-7, describe God's appeal to Israel.

    b. From these verses, how would you characterize the state of the people's hearts toward God?

13. a. Explain what each of these phrases from Micah 6:8 mean.

"To act justly"

"To love mercy"

"To walk humbly with your God"

b. How is God calling you to apply this instruction?

14. In what way does Micah 7:7-9 offer hope to Israel and to us regarding past failures?

15. Which truth about God in Micah 7:18-20 stood out to you personally?

Sixth Day: Review Micah.

God cares how His people treat others.

16. How does the reality of God's coming King and kingdom impact your life?

Lecture Notes

Next step: Read Lesson Notes.

Lesson Notes

Micah

Focus Verse

"He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." – Micah 6:8

Outline

- God's Coming Judgment – Micah 1–3
- God's Coming Messiah – Micah 4–5
- God's Prevailing Mercy – Micah 6–7

Engage

In a world that thrives on self-focus, how can we know God's vision for the community of His people? Micah clearly tells us: "To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." Unfortunately, we often care more about ourselves than God or others. When our goals, ideas, or agendas supersede our relationship with God, damage inevitably ensues. Sin's destruction ultimately sets people against one another in myriad ways – interpersonal conflict, corporate corruption, deception, power struggles, and oppression. Love of self erodes our love for God. Failure to love God leads to a lack of love for others. **Our relationship with God directly impacts how we treat one another.**

God sent Micah to Judah – the people of God who had lost their love for Him. As a result, oppression, violence, and corruption overran the nation. **God cares how His people treat others.** The ways we deal with others matter. Micah presented God's warning to both the northern and southern kingdoms – Israel and Judah. He cried out for heartfelt repentance that would bring transformation within God's people. Pronouncing dire judgment alongside certain hope, Micah's message of the coming Messiah resonates even today. In a future day, Jesus Christ will reign over His people with perfect peace, justice, mercy, and love.

Who Was Micah?

- **The Prophet:** Micah's name means "who is like the Lord?" He was a contemporary of Isaiah, Amos, and Hosea.
- **The Audience:** Primarily Judah, but also Israel approaching their imminent downfall to Assyria
- **The Message:** God's judgment through foreign nations; God's salvation through a future Deliverer
- **The Image to Remember:** Swords into plowshares

God's Coming Judgment – Micah 1–3

God's Accusations and Warnings –1:1–2:11

Micah delivered three messages that began with the command to "listen."[1] Micah's first exhortation denounced Israel and Judah's sins against God and man. At the same time, he warned of approaching judgment. **In a courtroom-like scene, Micah summoned the nations to witness God's charges against His people.** Sin and idolatry ran rampant throughout both kingdoms. God's imminent judgment against His chosen people served as an example and warning to surrounding nations. Ultimately, all peoples of the earth are accountable to God the Creator.

Israel's and Judah's Sins Against God – 1:1-16

Micah exposed the sins of Israel and Judah before the nations – for all to see. Micah declared, "The LORD... comes down and treads on the heights of the earth." **Idolatry pervaded Israel and threatened Judah.** Pagan worship sites, often referred to as the "high places," permeated the land as idolatry infiltrated God's people. Micah lamented, "It has reached the very gate of my people, even to Jerusalem itself."

Idolatry corrupted the nation and blatantly dishonored God. **With pure and loving jealousy, God rightfully called His people to prioritize their relationship with Him.** God deserves the same loyalty today. Anything or anyone we put above God alienates us from Him and becomes an idol. God alone deserves undivided worship. Micah addressed God's great power in judgment exclaiming, "The mountains melt beneath him and the valleys split apart, like wax before the fire ...." The power of almighty God surpasses all other powers. Israel and Judah's focus on false gods clouded their minds. For people past, present, and future, a healthy fear of God comes from understanding His supreme and incomparable nature. All power and authority belong to Him.

Israel's and Judah's Sins Against People – 2:1-5

God's accusations followed the framework of His law, addressing love for God and proper love for other people.[2] Micah cited ample proof of guilt that deserved judgment. The powerful among the people plotted and carried out their evil plans as their love for God waned. They unjustly took advantage of others. They coveted the fields and houses of those less fortunate, then seized the property for themselves. A family's field likely provided their primary source of income and represented their inheritance in God's promised land.[3]

God stood firmly against this evil treatment of others. He saw the corrupt practices that left the poor defenseless – at the mercy of their affluent oppressors. Micah pronounced God's approaching calamity upon the rich landowners. Foreign invaders would soon enact His judgment. God would take away what He had originally given to His people.

1: Listen: Micah 1:2; 3:1; 6:1
2: God's law: Exodus 20:1-17; Matthew 5; 22:36-40
3: Inheritance: Joshua 13–21

The Harmonious Message of Micah and His Contemporary Prophets

The unity of Micah's message with Hosea, Isaiah, and Amos reflects God's persistent call to His covenant people to turn away from idols and worship Him wholeheartedly. Each prophet offered a unique angle on God's consistent message. The fact that God sent multiple prophets within the same time frame illustrates the depth of His mercy for His rebellious people. God's unified messages reveal that His will and purposes never change. The themes of these prophets might feel repetitive to us as we move from book to book, but we should not miss God's resounding warnings. What does God want us to learn from these ancient spokesmen who delivered His repeated pleas? God repeats His messages because we tend to forget. The God who spoke then continues to speak today. What is He saying to us?

The Sins of the False Prophets – 2:6-11

False prophets deceived the people and contributed to the nation's sin. They successfully silenced God's true prophets and commanded Micah to cease his preaching. The false prophets influenced every aspect of culture. They encouraged and even empowered the rulers in acts of social injustice. Additionally, they led every man and woman into destruction. The people unconditionally accepted any prophet who tailored his message to "what their itching ears wanted to hear."[4]

God's Promise of Restoration – 2:12-13

An abrupt pivot occurs as God's tone and tenor drastically change from judgment to promise. He assured "all of you, Jacob" of His future redemption. **God promised to gather His people once again, even the very house of Jacob that He rightfully charged with sin and guilt.** He pledged to "bring them together like sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture ...." God vowed to break the walls of their exile and lead them out of bondage. He promised to be their King.

This shocking and glorious transition reveals God's steadfast determination to save His people. God does not base His salvation on merit, but rather on His mercy. **In an act of divine grace, God promised to save the people even before they turned from their sin.**

God's Rebuke of Israel's and Judah's Leaders – 3

The Wickedness of Leaders – 3:1-4

Micah's second message addressed corrupt leaders. He reminded these leaders of their responsibility to uphold justice asking, "Should you not embrace justice ...?" Refusing to steward their calling well, these selfish leaders abused their authority without concern for others. Micah accused them of hating good and loving evil. They unjustly oppressed God's people. Micah dramatically pictured the nation

---

4: Itching ears: Jeremiah 14:13-15; Ezekiel 13:15-16; 2 Timothy 4:3

as cattle devoured by her leaders. As a result of their exploitive ways, God would not answer these rulers when they cried out to Him. God delegates and holds leaders accountable for the privilege and responsibility entrusted to them.

The Corruption of False Prophets – 3:5-8

Alongside the ruling class, the kingdom's false prophets joined in unjust practices against the people. Micah issued God's rebuke to these evil men who leveraged their position and influence to line their own pockets. They favored those who could pay them, and prophesied ruin on those who could not. Their failure to surrender would result in judgment. False prophets faced the same consequences as the ruling class. God would cease to answer them, leaving them blind and silenced.

In stark contrast to the ruling class and false prophets, Micah stood firmly with God. **The Holy Spirit empowered Micah and confirmed his message as authoritative and true.** "But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin."

God's Repeated Condemnation of Self-Serving Leaders – 3:9-12

In his final rebuke, Micah lumped together all of Israel's and Judah's ruling classes. **He indicted the leaders who judged for a bribe, the priests who taught for a price, and the prophets who practiced divination for money.** These wicked leaders assumed God's ongoing favor and blessing simply because they identified themselves with God. How wrong they were! How dangerous it is to claim to be right before God and treat others wrongly! God would destroy everything their wicked schemes built. Zion would be "plowed like a field." Jerusalem would "become a heap of rubble."

Throughout history, many oppressive groups and individuals have claimed outward success as evidence of God's favor. Though deceit and corruption often seem to win the day, God always has the final say. Micah spoke truths that provide comfort for us today. God does not turn a blind eye to the evil in our world. He sees, knows, and remembers everything. **God's merciful heart responds when cruel mistreatment crushes people.** No evil or unrepentant act will escape His final judgment.

God's Coming Messiah – Micah 4–5

God's Coming Kingdom – 4

Judgment No More – 4:1-5

Once again, Micah shifted from judgment to hope. God would not reject His people forever. "In the last days," God's future kingdom will arrive physically to earth. Unlike the self-serving leadership of Israel and Judah, God will rule His kingdom with perfect justice, righteousness, and peace. Peoples of all nations will say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD," and they will flow into Jerusalem to worship their King. The fruitful, prosperous, and secure people will "beat their swords

into plowshares."[5] War will be no more, and "no one will make them afraid." Even as foreign nations seek other gods, Micah proclaimed that God's people will walk in the name of their Lord forever and ever.

Hope of Restoration – 4:6-13

For the first time, Micah revealed Babylon as God's chosen instrument of judgment against Judah. Proclaiming details of God's looming judgment, he also delivered God's promise of future restoration. **Micah's declaration of God's coming kingdom would be a sure source of hope for His people.** Though Babylon would take Judah captive, the Lord would restore her unto Himself. The nation He rendered lame would again be made strong. God would not desert them. He gave His people hope to persevere through the pain of His discipline.

God's Coming King – 5

Arrival of the King – 5:1-6

God's kingdom surely called for His chosen King. But who? Micah specified that God's coming King would be from Bethlehem – an insignificant town "small among the clans of Judah." The same King would be "from of old, from ancient times," yet utterly unlike the failed leadership Israel and Judah knew. God's King would bring peace, not only to Judah, but to the whole world. He would rule in the strength of the Lord and fulfill God's promise to David. **God's King is Jesus Christ, born in Bethlehem.**

God's King would bring peace, not only to Judah, but to the whole world. He would rule in the strength of the Lord and fulfill God's promise to David.

Restoration Accomplished by the King – 5:7-15

Micah's prophecy looked forward to the ultimate establishment of God's coming King and kingdom. Jesus Christ – God's King – came initially in humility to conquer sin and death through His own death and resurrection. **This same Jesus Christ will one day come again to eradicate sin and death from the earth and restore His people.**

About that future time, Micah proclaimed God's restored people – the "remnant of Jacob" – will wield influence among the nations. For some, the presence of God's people will be a source of blessing. For others, God's remnant will be a source of fear and dread. Micah also proclaimed that at that time God will divest His people of all military resources, as instruments of war are of no use in times of peace. **God will eliminate all forms of self-reliance and idolatry so that His people may rest in, rely on, and trust only in Christ the King.**

5: Swords into plowshares: Isaiah 2:4

Jesus, the Coming King

The Doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ

Old Testament prophets saw end-time events from afar. Jesus' first and second comings merged like two mountain peaks viewed together from a great distance. The Old Testament presented God's entire timeline. The New Testament explains Jesus' first and second comings as two distinct events. From where we stand today, we clearly differentiate between the two. We know that Jesus first came to earth to pay for mankind's sin. **Jesus Christ will come again to judge the earth and reign in great glory.**[6]

The Bible foretells Jesus' victorious second coming and offers that certainty as a source of hope for God's people. **The Bible teaches that Jesus will return to the earth in a sudden, physical, visible, and unexpected way.**[7] The exact time of His coming remains a secret which "no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Matthew 24:36).

Without faith in God's triumphant conclusion to human history, this world seems to careen forward randomly. The chaos we see all around us suggests that society is falling apart. Anxiety takes hold in human hearts. In addition, failure to recognize Jesus' pending return as victor and judge minimizes any personal sense of accountability to God for sin. With no expectation of God's involvement in the affairs of earth, the future remains murky and frightening.

The promise of Jesus' return offers the hope and resolution we so long for. The world is not falling apart, but rather falling into place. God's irrevocable control of the "end of the story" stabilizes His children when current events or daily life seem confusing or discouraging. Jesus' return signifies more than His commitment to right wrongs and judge evil. People who turn to Christ for salvation face the future assured that they will not face the condemnation or judgment their sin deserves. Because of Christ, believers await physical and spiritual transformation – an eternal state of glory when they will be unable to sin and unable to die.[8] Jesus will reign on earth, bring final judgment, and establish His eternal kingdom where sin, pain, and death cannot enter. Justice and peace (shalom) will reign. The Son of God will come again – this is our greatest source of hope.

God's Prevailing Mercy – Micah 6–7

God's Case Against Israel – 6:1-8

God's Plea – 6:1-5

(Note: Micah and the other prophets often used the term "Israel" to speak comprehensively of both Israel and Judah.) Micah opened his final message to God's people with a return to his courtroom

---

6: Jesus will return: John 14:3; Acts 1:11
7: Jesus' unexpected return: Matthew 24:27, 36-44; 25:13; Luke 12:40; 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3
8: Believers' resurrection: 1 Corinthians 15:50-58

motif. He alternated dialogue between God, the people, and himself. **With the earth as His witness, God pled His case by tracing His own acts of faithfulness throughout Israel's history.** He remembered His faithful rescue from Egypt, redemption from slavery, and His provision of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam to lead them. God recalled His gracious protection against the schemes of Balak.[9] He recounted the parting of the Jordan and their safe entrance into the promised land.[10] God clearly made His case. Throughout His people's history, He remained faithful. God kept His promises to His people.

His People's Proper Response – 6:6-8

In light of God's proven faithfulness, Micah asked how the people should respond. His rhetorical questions highlighted the people's hypocrisy. They were quick to perform outwardly religious sacrifices but slow to acknowledge their inward sin. How important is justice to God? **Micah revealed that God does not care about the worship of those who do not care about justice.**

Micah followed his rhetorical questions with this instruction: "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." What does it mean that God requires us "to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God?" Is this "requirement" contrary to the Bible's claim of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone? No! **Works do not save anyone, but those whom God saves live in ways that uphold justice.**[11]

By His Spirit, God instills in His people a heart commitment that yields right behavior. This true, authentic faith reflects God's consistent message throughout the Bible.[12] Actions alone do not save anyone. Behavior that pleases God flows from a heart redeemed by Him – a heart that knows from experience His boundless love, mercy, grace, and forgiveness. This is what God desires from His people.

God's Judgment Against Israel – 6:9–7:7

God's Coming Judgment – 6:9-16

God's character and standards do not change. He is never fickle. He previously warned His people of imminent judgment if they failed to turn from their evil ways. He would indeed act on His words of warning. As Judah's corruption escalated, God's purifying discipline approached. **Just as Assyria overwhelmed Israel, so Babylon, God's appointed instrument of judgment, would overwhelm Judah.**

Micah's Lament – 7:1-7

A cry of lament rose within Micah as he considered the circumstances of his day. Surrounded by wickedness and the threat of desolation, Micah searched in vain for even one godly, upright person. Sadly, corruption, deceit, and violence permeated the land. Yet in steadfast faith, Micah proclaimed, "But as for me, I watch in hope for the LORD, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me." **In the face of dire conditions, Micah trusted God and His promise of restoration.**

9: Balak and Balaam: Numbers 22–24
10: Shittim and Gilgal: Joshua 3
11: Works: Ephesians 2:8-10
12: Faith and right behavior: Deuteronomy 10:12-19; Matthew 22:37-39

God's Mercy for Repentant Israel – 7:8-20

Astonishingly, Micah's final message progressed from accusation to punishment, with a culminating turn to remember God's prevailing mercy. Micah joined Isaiah in revealing that a remnant of God's people would repent and profess faith in God. **Though devastated by judgment, God's people would rise again.** They would confess their sin, acknowledge God's justice, anticipate God's restoration, and meet God's mercy. Indeed, God reserves the blessings of His coming kingdom for all who, through repentance, place their faith in God's coming King, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Who is this God who pardons sin and forgives transgressions? Micah's parting words linger on God's steadfast love as he cries out, "Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance?" **Our gracious God does not remain angry forever but delights to show mercy and compassion.** He treads our sins underfoot and hurls our iniquities into the depths of the sea. He remains faithful to show love to His people even as He promised in days long ago.

Micah confronted the specific ways the people failed to honor God and people around them. God's people are to love justice and mercy, just as He does. **God cares how His people treat others.** Israel and Judah faced a day of reckoning, as God held them accountable for their sins against God and others. However, His promise of judgment came with a message of hope. Micah's warnings resonate with us today. We live in a world that continues to witness wickedness perpetrated against people. God, who is gracious and merciful, calls His people to reflect His character in the way they care for and love others.

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

God sent Micah to confront His people's sin, warn of coming judgment, and offer hope of restoration. Israel and Judah violated their covenant with God. Rather than loving God with their whole hearts, they pursued idols. Instead of loving their neighbors as themselves, they abused and oppressed their fellow countrymen. Wicked leaders ruled out of self-interest. Corrupt prophets preached only what the people wanted to hear. God's just judgment would rightfully come to this degenerate, self-serving people. However, before His judgment, God again offered a warning and an opportunity to repent. God desires hearts fully devoted to Him. He is long-suffering, but He will not allow sin to go unpunished forever.

Beyond the painful judgment, God promised hope and restoration. Micah revealed that a remnant of God's people would indeed trust God. They would enjoy the blessings of God's coming kingdom under the reign of God's coming King. Born in Bethlehem, Jesus Christ – the King of kings and Lord of lords – will rule a kingdom of peace and perfect justice. Jesus stands victoriously opposed to all sin, idolatry, injustice, and oppression. **One day, God's King and kingdom will be fully, firmly, and physically established on earth.** When that day comes, everything that has gone wrong in all of creation and all of history will finally be made right.

Apply It

Micah, like other prophets, exposed Israel's sins and offered God's merciful appeal. God called His people to love and serve Him wholeheartedly. Despite God's proven faithfulness, social sins and leadership failures flowed downstream from their rejection of God – with devastating results. Lack of love for God inevitably distorts our love for anything else. Mistreatment of the poor and the exchange of truth for self-serving lies permeated the nation and its leaders. **God's people should live differently because of who God is and what He has done.** People who experience God's grace and forgiveness desire to "act justly" and "love mercy." God's people are not to be malicious or even indifferent regarding others, but are to pursue justice with humility. A right view of self before the exalted God leads us to "walk humbly" with Him. As you study God's Word and walk with Him, are you growing not only in knowledge *of* Him, but love *for* Him? How has the depth of God's love led you to love Him supremely? In what ways does His love erase your fears and overflow to others through you?

Micah offered a glimpse of King Jesus and His kingdom to come. Christians belong to God's kingdom and are called to live by God's kingdom ethics. **God calls His people to practice the values and virtues that reflect His heart – kindness, generosity, courage, and love.** Do you make an effort to defend the defenseless and lift up the lowly? Individually and corporately, God calls His people to uphold what matters to Him. Sometimes the world's injustice so overwhelms us that we feel our little contribution will not matter. Do you know your neighbors and the burdens they bear? Do oppression and violence in faraway lands matter to you? How might God be calling you to repent of apathy toward injustice? Let us press on in love for God and love for neighbor, so that our world today might better resemble God's coming kingdom. What is God asking you to do? What first step is He asking you to take?

God delights to show mercy. When God extends pardon and forgiveness, He does so with divine joy. Compassion flows abundantly from God's heart and, as sinners, we are the grateful recipients. What did it cost for God to "tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:19)? Jesus paid sin's price so that we could joyfully anticipate the glorious release from sin's bondage. Our salvation was costly. God displayed His extravagant grace at the cross. His mercy continues to flow into our lives in so many ways. **As we grow in love for the God who first loved us, may His compassion lead us to extend grace and hope to others.** Even when we fall, we can rise in hope as we walk with God, who leads us from darkness into light. We exult with Micah – "Who is a God like you?" Only God can satisfy our longings and meet our deepest needs. No one and nothing can compare to God. He is our refuge and strength. Express your words of gratitude and hope to God in prayer. Will you ask God to empower you to live in a way that reflects His heart?

All Scripture quotations in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ® NIV ®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Nahum and Zephaniah – God's Purifying Judgment and Promised Restoration

Nahum and Zephaniah

Lesson Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 23 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What truth from the notes helped you understand how love for God impacts the way we treat others? What is God leading you to do?

2. In what way did the lecture specifically challenge or encourage you this week?

Second Day: Read Nahum 1.

Nahum prophesied God's vengeance on Nineveh.

3. Nahum was written at the zenith of Nineveh's power – approximately 100 years after Jonah and 50 years before the city was destroyed.

   a. In 1:1-6, how does Nahum describe God's character that stood behind His actions against Nineveh?

© BSF 2022 (This material may be downloaded from mybsf.org and used by BSF class members in connection with their personal BSF class studies. It may not be otherwise reproduced without BSF's written permission.)

b. What contrasts do you see between God's firmness in judgment and His tender care for His own?

c. How do believers find comfort and peace balancing God's promise to judge evil and the good news of salvation in Christ (see Romans 5:10-11 and Nahum 1:6-8 alongside Isaiah 52:7 and Romans 10:15)?

4. Think about our previous study of Jonah. How might you explain the difference between Jonah and his message for Nineveh and Nahum and his prophecy against the same empire (see Jonah 3:3-5, 10)?

5. a. Why was this announcement of Nineveh's judgment important to the people of Judah?

b. Reread Nahum 1:3. How do you find personal comfort in God and His character?

Third Day: Read Nahum 2–3.

Nahum vividly described Nineveh's fall.

6. Find words or phrases that describe:

The enemy's appearance

The siege and looting of the city

The flooding of the city and its results

The fall of Nineveh's fortresses

The sins for which Nineveh is judged

7. a. How does the entire book of Nahum illustrate Psalm 119:89 and Matthew 5:18?

   b. In what ways does this truth offer you confidence and hope?

8. Which verse in Nahum is particularly meaningful to you? Why?

Fourth Day: Read Zephaniah 1:1–3:8.

Zephaniah prophesied judgment on Judah and surrounding nations.

9. During whose reign was this book written? What happened in Judah under this king (skim 2 Kings 22–23)?

10. What specifics about God's judgment do the following verses reveal?

    Zephaniah 1:2-3

    Zephaniah 1:4-5

    Zephaniah 1:12-16

11. From Zephaniah 2:4-15, list the other nations who awaited God's judgment. What do you learn from this?

12. What specific sins is Jerusalem charged with in 3:1-8?

13. How do people today respond to the thought of God's judgment? What reasons do people give for their response?

Fifth Day: Read Zephaniah 3:9-20.

God promised restoration of a remnant within Israel.

14. What glorious promises offered hope to the people of Judah?

15. Zephaniah 3:12-13 declares God's ongoing plan for a remnant from within Israel.

    a. How does this truth reveal God's faithfulness?

    b. In what way do you see the principle of a "remnant" as part of God's ongoing plan for humanity (see Matthew 7:13-14 and 1 Corinthians 1:26-27)?

16. Which verse in this passage did you find particularly meaningful or encouraging?

Sixth Day: Review Nahum and Zephaniah.

God exercises purifying wrath against sin but offers restorative grace to those who seek Him.

17. What was the strongest message the Lord spoke to you from your study of Nahum and Zephaniah?

No homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders

Lecture Notes

Next step: Read Lesson Notes.

Lesson Notes

Nahum and Zephaniah

Focus Verse

"The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in Him, but with an overwhelming flood he will make an end of Nineveh; he will pursue his foes into the realm of darkness." – Nahum 1:7-8

"Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, you who do what He commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the LORD's anger." – Zephaniah 2:3

Outline

- Nahum's Prophecy of Judgment on Nineveh – Nahum
- Zephaniah's Prophecy of Judgment and Restoration – Zephaniah

Engage

We enjoy thinking about God's love. Knowing that God loves us perfectly warms our hearts. There are, however, other aspects of God's character to consider. Limited by our finite understanding of righteous anger, we struggle to comprehend how God justly exercises fierce vengeance against people He created and claims to love. Sure – sinful people offend God and hurt others. So – how do we reconcile God's righteous wrath with His perfect love? In truth, God's justice and judgment flow from His abounding love. What kind of love would ignore the grievous toll taken by sin? **God's righteous wrath burns against all that threatens what His perfect love protects.**

Nahum and Zephaniah proclaimed God's message of judgment as well as God's just, sovereign, and merciful character. Judgment awaited Judah and the nations who proudly mocked God and oppressed His people. God sent His prophets to assure them that He would end sin's reign and bring restoration and renewal. **God exercises purifying wrath against sin but offers restorative grace to those who seek Him.** He sent His Son to offer us salvation from sin's destruction and His just wrath. God will not leave the guilty unpunished, but He also never leaves people without a way of salvation.

Who Was Nahum?

- **The Prophet:** Nahum – from the Judean village of Elkosh, his name means "comfort"
- **The Audience:** Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria
- **The Message:** God's judgment upon Nineveh and the Assyrian empire
- **The Image to Remember:** Overwhelming flood

This week's lesson combines two prophetic books – Nahum and Zephaniah. Nahum prophesied God's judgment against Nineveh, the capital city of Judah's enemy Assyria. Zephaniah proclaimed God's coming judgment on Judah and other nations, and His subsequent restoration of a faithful remnant. **Both prophecies champion God's just and sovereign character – offering assurance and comfort to God's people.** Just as He promised, God will destroy His enemies, judge sin, and redeem the faithful. All are accountable to the creator God.

Nahum's Prophecy of Judgment on Nineveh – Nahum

God's Character and Power – 1

God's Prophet Nahum – 1:1

Nahum's message regarding the downfall of Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire comforted God's people. God Almighty would jealously avenge Judah by executing justice on her enemy nation. Nineveh's downfall represents the toppling of a seemingly impenetrable metropolis. The bloodthirsty Assyrian armies abused and conquered other nations with vicious cruelty.

Situated in Judah, Nahum prophesied around the time of kings Manasseh[1] and Josiah.[2] Nahum ministered prior to Nineveh's fall (around 612 B.C.) and after the Assyrian conquest of Thebes in Egypt (663 B.C.)[3]

Assyria's ominous threat loomed large over Judah. They witnessed the Assyrian capture of the northern kingdom of Israel and the deportation of its citizens. The Assyrian King Sennacherib's siege on Jerusalem under King Hezekiah[4] stood as a vivid memory. Now, Judah lived in the shadow of the Assyrian King Ashurbanipal's bloody campaign to conquer all nations. **Nahum's promise of Nineveh's defeat reassured Judah that the Lord rules the nations.**

God's Jealous and Avenging Love – 1:2-8

Nahum first pointed to God Himself as he began his declaration of judgment. Nahum declared, "The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord takes vengeance and is filled with wrath." **God's desire to avenge evil rises from His deep love for His people and His holy hatred of sin.** Ultimately, God intervened to bring justice, despite the many political factors that contributed to Nineveh's collapse.

The edict of divine judgment Nahum delivered incorporated more than Assyria's persistent and brutal evil. Nearly a century before, Jonah's reluctant preaching brought repentance to the city.[5] Perhaps Nahum delivered the message Jonah would have preferred to speak. **Despite God's warnings, Assyria's guilt before God piled up as they returned to idolatry, cruelty, and extreme arrogance.** Assyria's rampant idolatry negatively impacted Judah, who sought to imitate the Assyrians.[6]

1: Manasseh: 2 Kings 21:1-18; 2 Chronicles 33:1-20
2: Josiah: 2 Kings 22:1–23:30; 2 Chronicles 34–35
3: Thebes: Nahum 3:8
4: Jerusalem's siege: 2 Kings 18–19
5: Repentance under Jonah: Jonah 3:5-9
6: Ahaz and Manasseh's seeking of Assyrian gods: 2 Kings 16; 21

Nahum reminded Judah that God's patience did not reveal powerlessness or injustice. Nahum clearly explained God's motive for exercising judgment: "The Lord is slow to anger but great in power; the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished." God would come in great power – as "the whirlwind and the storm." At His command, seas and rivers dry up, mountains quake, hills melt, and rocks shatter. God's indignation would pour out "like fire."

God is simultaneously perfectly just and perfectly good. Trouble awaited Nineveh, but His promise of just vengeance came with an offer to shelter those who trusted Him. **God's avenging power provides comfort to those who take refuge in Him.** Nahum's message of judgment on Nineveh comforted Judah, even though they faced their own judgment.

Assyria pridefully reveled in power and exalted herself above God. However, neither military strength nor false gods could withstand God's almighty power. God broke through Nineveh's walls as the city's inhabitants spilled out like an "overwhelming flood" – exposed and defenseless before God's wrath.

God's Power Toppled Nineveh's Pride– 1:9-15

History confirms the fulfillment of Nahum's vision. By 612 B.C., the Babylonians and Medes conquered Nineveh. By 605 B.C., all remnants of the Assyrian Empire vanished. The ruins of Nineveh remained buried until 1845. God always fulfills whatever He promises.

After promising Assyria's demise, God called His people to worship: "Celebrate your festivals, Judah, and fulfill your vows. No more will the wicked invade you; they will be completely destroyed." In love, God saved Judah from both physical and spiritual destruction. This historical victory for God's people prefigures Christ's victory on the cross. God's Son conquered our spiritual enemies and "disarmed the powers and authorities."[7]

God's Judgment on Nineveh – 2–3

Nineveh's Fall – 2

Through Nineveh's fall, God would restore the splendor of His chosen people. **Nahum prophetically described details of Nineveh's future fall to Babylon with amazing accuracy.** He offered dramatic images of an invading army with flashing red shields, scarlet-clad warriors, and flashing metal chariots. God, the only source of true strength,[8] scattered and disarmed Nineveh. Assyria brutally attacked, enslaved, and pillaged other nations and peoples. They would suffer the same fate they imposed on others. Like a pool of water, God would drain the city of its perceived strength, opulent splendor, ill-gotten wealth, and evil rulers. The Assyrian lions would fall before the Lion of Judah, who fights for His covenant flock.[9]

God declared His avenging fury against those who devour His covenant people. God hates and opposes oppression and injustice. He proclaimed to Nineveh, "I am against you." God's startling declaration should strike fear into mortal hearts. **God's almighty power comes against those who oppose Him but works on behalf of those in covenant relationship with Him.** In His perfect time and way, God will avenge evil and deliver His people.[10]

7: Christ's victory: Colossians 2:13-15
8: God's strength: Psalm 146
9: The Lion of Judah: Hosea 5:14; Revelation 5:5
10: God's vengeance: Revelation 6:9-11

Nineveh: A Monument to Worldly Splendor and Power

Nineveh was founded by Nimrod – an evil, boastful, and mighty warrior of ancient days.[11] A byword for violence and evil, the Assyrian capital was a huge metropolis featuring multiple cities and suburbs. Jonah traveled three full days to preach across the wide expanse of the city, thought to be about 60 miles (97 km) in circumference.[12] Seemingly impregnable walls with 15 gates and many tall towers protected the city.Three chariots could drive side by side atop the thick inner walls. Nineveh's royal palace boasted unparalleled opulence and an impressive armory. The Babylonian army conquered the city, which was flooded, burned, and plundered. The fortress of human power perceived as invincible fell at God's command.

Nineveh's Disgrace – 3

Nahum delivered a message of doom for Nineveh, pronouncing judgment and exposing their specific sins. Picturing Nineveh as a sultry seductress, Nahum exposed her perverse immorality. The image of a prostitute personifying evil reappeared in John's vision in Revelation 17. God would uncover the ugliness and horror behind sin's siren song for all to see. This disguised deception behind the allure of wealth, pleasure, and comfort would be revealed as the city was wrecked and the people were killed and scattered. Many times, what the world values most is not what God values.

God dealt His adversary a grievous wound. Nahum's prophecy spoke beyond Nineveh's fall to foreshadow God's cosmic victory over Satan.[13] This adversary prowls like a hunting lion,[14] seduces with lies,[15] and opposes God and everything He values.[16] God's ultimate and total defeat of Satan, sin, and evil remains certain. People who put their faith in God can trust that He will avenge evil perfectly – in His way and at the time He determines.[17]

Zephaniah's Prophecy of Judgment and Restoration – Zephaniah

God's Judgment on Judah and the Nations – 1:1–3:8

Zephaniah's Lineage and Theme – 1:1

Zephaniah's lineage goes back four generations to someone named Hezekiah, most likely King Hezekiah.[18] **Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of Josiah, a godly king who brought**

11: Nimrod: Genesis 10:8-11
12: Jonah's preaching: Jonah 3:3
13: God's ultimate victory: Genesis 3:15; John 12:31; Hebrews 2:14; Revelation 12
14: Prowling lion: 1 Peter 5:8
15: Father of lies: John 8:44
16: Opposing God: Revelation 12:1-7
17: God's vengeance: Romans 12:17-21
18: Hezekiah: 2 Kings 18–20; 2 Chronicles: 29–32

Who Was Zephaniah?

- **The Prophet:** Zephaniah means "the Lord hides."
- **The Audience:** Judah, with a message of judgment reaching surrounding nations and, ultimately, the world
- **The Message:** Judgment and blessing in the day of the Lord
- **The Image to Remember:** Sweeping broom

spiritual reforms to Judah.[19] Zephaniah ministered during this time, denouncing idolatry and, specifically, Baal worship.[20] His message may have contributed to Josiah's godly leadership. However, the lingering influence of wicked kings caused these reforms to fade upon Josiah's death.

In many ways, Zephaniah's warnings and promises crystallized and summarized the messages of the prophets who preceded him. **Speaking with God's authority, Zephaniah announced God's purifying judgment of Judah and the nations but promised God would restore a remnant.** The intentional repetition of these proclamations conveyed God's persistence in pleading for His people. The recurring echo of these themes remains significant for us today.

God's Judgment on Judah – 1:2–2:3

Zephaniah's prophecy began with pervasive statements of global judgment. God declared, "I will sweep away everything from the face of the earth." Even nature suffered under sin's corrupting power.[21] God's just judgment is universal because sin is universal. Zephaniah incorporated Judah in his prediction in 1:4: "I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all who live in Jerusalem."

Like Joel, Zephaniah spoke of the "day of the LORD," a general term that expresses God's judgment.[22] **Zephaniah offered multiplied ominous descriptions of the bitter day when the "Mighty Warrior shouts his battle cry."** He spoke of distress, anguish, trouble, ruin, darkness, gloom, clouds, and blackness. God's wrath against sin is a serious matter.

Like other prophets, Zephaniah's prediction of the day of the Lord pointed to both an imminent and a distant fulfillment. God's judgment of the nations will ultimately occur at the second coming of His Son, Jesus. On that day, the Warrior King will judge the whole earth, restore His people, and consummate His kingdom.[23] God graciously offers shelter from His wrath through the willing sacrifice of His Son for the forgiveness of our sins.[24]

Zephaniah issued a tender invitation to Judah in 2:3 before offering further warnings to Judah and other nations: "Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the LORD's anger." God's compassionate heart for wayward people shines through. **Even as God announces judgment, He**

19: Josiah's reforms: 2 Kings 22:1–23:30
20: Baal worship: Numbers 25:1-5; Judges 2:13; Jeremiah 7:9; Hosea 2:8
21: Sin's curse on nature: Romans 8:19-21
22: The Day of the Lord: Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14, 18
23: Jesus' second coming: Matthew 25:31-46; Acts 17:31; 1 Corinthians 15:23-28; Revelation 19:11-21
24: Christ our shelter: Isaiah 51:17-22; Matthew 26:26-29; Romans 5:9; Colossians 3:1-11; 1 John 4:10

invites people to humble themselves and repent. God mercifully offers a way of salvation for those who seek refuge in Him.

God's Judgment on the Nations – 2:4-15

Zephaniah's next indictment focused on nations who brought trauma upon His people: Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Cush, and Assyria. His words against Assyria echo those of Nahum. Much like the prophet Amos, Zephaniah first charged the Gentile nations surrounding Judah, then zeroed in on Jerusalem. **Scripture clearly teaches the universal reign of God Almighty across generations and nations.** All individuals and nations remain accountable to Him, whether or not they recognize His authority. God is the only sovereign King of the whole earth. The pride and sins of all these nations were known to God as they awaited His just judgment.

God's Judgment of Jerusalem's Rulers – 3:1-8

God labeled Jerusalem a "city of oppressors." Rebellious and defiled, the people of Judah refused to trust God or draw near to Him. **God holds leaders accountable for the responsibility He delegates to them.** Zephaniah denounced Jerusalem's evil rulers and unprincipled prophets. The priests, appointed to serve God and the people, preyed on the helpless and profaned the sanctuary. Corruption overtook hearts that strayed away from God.

In stark contrast to Judah's corrupt leaders, Zephaniah upheld God's sovereign and holy character. "The Lord within her is righteous; he does no wrong. Morning by morning he dispenses his justice, and every new day he does not fail, yet the unrighteous know no shame." God Himself is our stronghold when people disappoint us. **God remained steadfastly merciful, while Judah remained stubbornly unrepentant.**

God's Restoration of a Remnant – 3:9-20

Restored to Purity – 3:9-13

God's story does not end with despair and destruction. Consistent with the other prophets, Zephaniah presented God's truth about judgment but also solid reasons for hope. **God promised a day when His scattered people would be purified and united.** With haughtiness, arrogance, and deception removed, God vowed to restore the meek and humble remnant of Israel. Zephaniah offered a beautiful description of the renewed purity and deliverance from fear that God's people would experience on a future day.

Restored to Joy – 3:14-20

Zephaniah's final words declare a bright and joyful future – a time when God's people find rest in His presence. **Though scattered throughout the earth, God will gather the exiles from the lands where they have suffered shame.** God vowed to bring His people home. This promise refers to a physical regathering of the Israelites and restoration to their land but points to a larger and more distant fulfillment as well. Both promises are important. God brought hope to Israel as a people, and that will grow to impact all nations through Christ. Jesus inaugurated the fulfillment of these

God's Holy Hatred of Sin

The Doctrine of God's Wrath

Most people today ignore or reject the thought of God's wrath, preferring to believe that God accepts anything and everyone equally. Like everything God is and does, God exercises His wrath in perfect balance with His entire nature. God loves everything that is good and right. Therefore, He opposes everything that threatens what and whom He loves. God's wrath represents a deliberate response of His justice, holiness, and love against all that dishonors Him. Whereas God's love flows intrinsically from His nature, His wrath represents His holy response to the ravages of sin. God does not exercise wrath in gleeful retribution or to "get even." **God's holy anger stands as a protective and purifying expression of His divine love.**

The Bible offers many manifestations of God's wrath: the Flood,[25] the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah,[26] and the plagues of Egypt[27] to name a few. Nahum and Zephaniah warned of God's wrath and impending action against unrepentant evil and idolatry. Judah, Israel, and foreign nations alike encountered God's just judgment of their sin. Today, God's wrath is being revealed against sin and ungodliness.[28] In the future, God's wrath will be poured out on the earth as He removes Satan and evil forever.[29] Every person is born with a sinful nature and deserves God's wrath.[30] **Anyone who puts their faith in Jesus Christ's atoning sacrifice receives eternal salvation because He absorbed God's wrath on their behalf.**[31]

Despite Satan's attempts to hide this truth, God's wrath against sin cannot be dismissed or ignored. **Without an understanding of God's just response to sin, Jesus' cross and the gospel do not make sense.** Failure to recognize this truth minimizes the gravity of both personal and corporate sin and universal accountability to God. We cannot maintain a right view of God without understanding the seriousness of His wrath. Psalm 90:11 says, "If only we knew the power of your anger! Your wrath is as great as the fear that is your due."

The truth about God's wrath helps us comprehend the amazing beauty and wonder of Jesus' cross. God's own Son came to earth as a man, lived a sinless life, and died a sacrificial death for sinners. In His infinite perfection, Jesus absorbed the full force of God's wrath against the sins of countless people who trust Him for salvation. For every believer, God's wrath has been fully satisfied – the debt of sin has been paid in full. As those spared from God's wrath, believers should be particularly motivated to share the gospel with others. Multiplied voices in heaven will proclaim: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments" (Revelation 19:1-2a).

25: Flood: Genesis 6–8
26: Sodom and Gomorrah: Genesis 19
27: Egyptian plagues: Exodus 7–11
28: Wrath revealed: Romans 1:18-20
29: Wrath to come: Matthew 3:7; 5:22; 18:8; Mark 9:47-48
30: God's wrath deserved: Romans 3:10-18
31: Saved from wrath: John 3:36; Romans 5:9**24: Seventy years in Babylon:** Jeremiah 25:11; 29:10

promises when He came to earth. God's own Son conquered sin, death, and Satan through His death and resurrection. And in the future, Jesus will come again to set up His eternal kingdom. God's glorious promises ultimately refer not just to the remnant of Israel, but also extend to the remnant among humanity who trust Jesus for salvation.

Not only will Judah experience joy, but God Himself will exult over His restored people. Zephaniah described God's own delight in the regathering of His children. "The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing." God rejoices not in the judgment of the wicked but in the restoration of the repentant.[32] He delights to draw us near and to bless us with His presence.

Zephaniah depicted a vibrant and restored city and people. God's people and their interactions will be characterized by meekness, humility, and joy rather than pride, arrogance, and cruelty. **God exercises purifying wrath against sin but offers restorative grace to those who seek Him.** These certain promises of wholeness, joy, and eternal safety await those who seek God and look to Jesus. The Son of God bore the wrath of God to make us the children of God.

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Through Nahum, God comforted Judah by declaring His jealous love and avenging justice against their oppressor, Nineveh. God warned Nineveh of His judgment upon their pride and violence. Nineveh's greed and lust for power lurked under her seductive and luxurious exterior. God promised to reveal Nineveh's sins and prevail as He incapacitated the city that boasted impenetrable strength. Nineveh and Assyria would fall – never to be seen again. **God's jealous and avenging wrath on Nineveh demonstrated His great love and care for His people.** Nahum exalted God's justice and sovereign power as a place of refuge for God's people.

Zephaniah prophesied God's purifying judgment over the whole earth and His gracious restoration of a repentant remnant. God's judgment included Judah, who had succumbed to Nineveh's idolatry. He could not allow that sin to continue. In justice and love, God would purify the earth of sin's corruption. Zephaniah warned Judah that the day of the Lord was quickly drawing near. Even as God promised His wrath against His people, He offered them shelter from His anger if they would repent and humbly seek Him. Additionally, God promised to restore a humble remnant to purity and fruitfulness. He would give them the land of the haughty nations and fill the earth with His righteous people. God would live in their midst, rejoice at their restoration, and bless them with physical and spiritual vitality.

Apply It

The truth about sin and judgment seldom surfaces in today's world. Nahum and Zephaniah's themes do not make comfortable dinner conversation. However, God's wrath against sin and inevitable

---

32: Delight to restore: Ezekiel 33:11; Luke 15:3-7; 2 Peter 3:9

judgment cannot be ignored forever. How has this study helped you understand the protective and purifying love that motivates God's wrath against sin? If you still struggle with God's retributive actions in this world and for eternity, express your hard questions and discomfort directly to God. To what lengths would you go to protect your children or those you love most dearly? While our flawed human reactions fall infinitely short of God's perfect responses, understanding who God is stretches our limited perspective. Who would God be if He left sin unchecked or let evil prevail? God cannot simply banish evil and forgive everyone without judgment. He holds all people responsible as moral agents made in His image. **Our struggle eases when we realize that God's beloved Son bore the full weight of His wrath on our behalf.** God's sacrificial solution to the wrath we deserve invites our grateful love and humble submission.

Zephaniah's final verses offer rich encouragement. God announced to His scattered people, "I will bring you home." The dispersed Israelites certainly longed to return to their homeland. The future that lay ahead for Israel pictures what lies ahead for believers. God's children live as wayfarers and pilgrims. Our feet walk on earth while our hearts long for heaven. We also want God to bring us home. The promises of a sinless, Christ-centered eternity praising God with a diverse throng of like-minded people motivates us. But what measure of "home" can God's children expect while we wait for that glorious day? There is good news – in Christ Himself we find our truest home. God seeks us even when we wander away from our "home" and find ourselves in the "pig pens" of life.[33] In God alone we find true security – a place of refuge. We join a family of believers and find a place of safety and joy, no matter what life brings. **Because of Jesus, we can be at home while we are not yet "home."** Will you hear God say, "I will bring you home" – for today and for eternity?

This lesson offers two interesting pictures of God. **The same God who judges sin with vengeance sings songs of delight over His restored children.** Recognizing the intensity of God's love helps us understand His holy hatred of sin. With divine perfection, God loves people and hates sin. God calls His children to share His heart. We grieve sin's wreckage and long for God's perfect justice to prevail. God's promise of ultimate victory provides eternal comfort, and His tender mercies bring daily joy. How wonderful to delight in Him! But – can you believe that God finds delight in you? Do you sense your Heavenly Father's pleasure in you, His child? God's love does not depend on your worthiness or performance. Jesus' sinless perfection blankets God's children. When you sin, and you will, He calls you to repent and welcomes you back with joy. God fights for you. The Mighty Warrior is your Beloved Shepherd. The fierceness of God's wrath reflects the fierceness of His love. In what specific way will you find rest, rescue, and hope in the Lord today?

33: God seeks us: Luke 15:11-32

All Scripture quotations in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ® NIV ®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Jeremiah Part 1 – Ministry and Message

Jeremiah

Lesson Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 24 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the notes on Nahum and Zephaniah challenge your thinking about God and His ways?

2. How did the lecture help you connect the messages in these books to your life?

Second Day: Read Jeremiah 1.

God called Jeremiah as a prophet to the nations.

3. a. What do you learn about Jeremiah from verses 1-4?

© BSF 2022 (This material may be downloaded from mybsf.org and used by BSF class members in connection with their personal BSF class studies. It may not be otherwise reproduced without BSF's written permission.)

b. From your previous study, describe what life was like during this period in Judah's history (skim 2 Kings 22–25, if helpful).

4. a. What truths about God and Jeremiah are revealed in verses 4-5?

b. How do these truths speak to you personally?

5. a. How did Jeremiah respond in verse 6, and how do you relate to his reaction?

b. What is significant to you about God's response to Jeremiah in this moment?

6. How did God describe Jeremiah's mission in verses 10-19?

Third Day: Read the selected passages from Jeremiah in the questions below.

Jeremiah passionately shared God's burden for the people of Judah.

7. Through many chapters, Jeremiah described Judah's coming judgment. Express the gravity of Jeremiah's message, as seen in the following verses:

   Jeremiah 2:5-6; 3:19-20

   Jeremiah 4:6; 6:1

   Jeremiah 10:17-18

   Jeremiah 25:8-14

8. a. What do the following verses reveal about Jeremiah's response to God's serious message?

   Jeremiah 4:19-21

   Jeremiah 9:1

   Jeremiah 10:23-25

   Jeremiah 15:16-18a

   b. How deeply are you burdened by the spiritual peril of those around you?

   c. Write a short prayer asking God to help your heart mirror His heart for people who need salvation.

Fourth Day: Read the selected passages from Jeremiah in the questions below.

Jeremiah's ministry brought him personal suffering.

9. Describe Jeremiah's personal experiences as a faithful servant of God from the following verses:

   Jeremiah 16:1-4

   Jeremiah 20:1-2

   Jeremiah 26:7-11

   Jeremiah 37:1-2, 16

   Jeremiah 38:6

10. How might you reconcile Jeremiah's personal suffering with his faithfulness and God's provision?

11. Read Jeremiah 38:7-13. What stands out or encourages you from this account?

Fifth Day: Read the selected passages from Jeremiah in the questions below.

Jeremiah spoke God's message as he warned of judgment but also promised hope.

12. Jeremiah called the wayward people to repent, even as he warned of pending judgment. Read Jeremiah 18:7-8 and 21:8-9 and reflect on how these invitations display God's heart.

13. a. Jeremiah warned of judgment but also promised a future day of restoration for God's people. He wrote a letter to exiles in Judah, recorded in Jeremiah 29:1-23. What stands out to you in Jeremiah's communication?

    b. Why is true hope so needed by people today? What gives you hope (see Jeremiah 14:22)?

Sixth Day: Review Jeremiah 1 along with the questions and passages above.

God calls His children to share His burdens, speak His message, and trust Him with the results.

14. What truths did you learn about Jeremiah, his mission, or his message? How will you respond to that truth?

Passage Discovery (homiletics, word study, etc.) for Group and Administrative Leaders: Jeremiah 1

Lecture Notes

Next step: Read Lesson Notes.

Lesson Notes

Jeremiah

Focus Verse

"See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant." – Jeremiah 1:10

Outline

- Jeremiah's Ministry – Jeremiah 1; 34–45
- Jeremiah's Message – Jeremiah 2–33; 46–52

Engage

God's promise to always be with us does not guarantee an easy life. We often expect God to protect us from harm when we seek to live for Him. Yet we find ourselves in a world where the majority turn away from Him. Following God requires swimming upstream – living a countercultural life. Speaking for God means proclaiming truth that some people mock and most reject or ignore. How do we continue to stand up for God while facing overwhelming pressure? What if obeying God makes your life harder, not easier? **God does not promise to spare His children from trouble, but He faithfully upholds those who put their trust in Him.**

God called Jeremiah to a long and difficult ministry. Jeremiah foretold tragic events and lived through them himself. He spoke on God's behalf to people who spurned God's message. Jeremiah bore the toll of costly obedience, physically and emotionally. He faced harsh circumstances, deep suffering, and painful rejection. Though he surely struggled through dark days, Jeremiah faithfully stood for God while the world around him crumbled. Sharing God's heart means caring more about the spiritual peril of others than personal ease. We live surrounded by people consumed by this world's charms and oblivious to the realities of eternity. As we enjoy the incomprehensible benefits of salvation, we must remain alert to the spiritual needs all around us. **God calls His children to share His burdens, speak His message, and trust Him with the results.**

Who Was Jeremiah?

- **The Prophet:** Jeremiah's name means "whom the Lord appoints."
- **The Audience:** Judah during the years leading up to and following their fall and subsequent exile to Babylon
- **The Message:** God's judgment against unrepentant Judah; hope beyond judgment for future restoration
- **The Images to Remember:** Almond branch, boiling pot, ruined linen belt, shattered clay vessel

We will study Jeremiah in two lessons:

- Jeremiah Part 1 – Ministry and Message (overview and themes of Jeremiah)
- Jeremiah Part 2 – Promises of Judgment, Restoration, and the New Covenant

Jeremiah's Ministry – Jeremiah 1; 34–45

The Man Jeremiah

Jeremiah was born in Anathoth, a small Levite village about 3 miles (4.8 km) from Jerusalem in the hill country of Benjamin. His father was a priest named Hilkiah – not to be confused with the high priest by the same name who discovered the book of the law during the reign of Josiah.[1] **Jeremiah was born into a family of priests and appointed by God as a prophet in Jerusalem.** His ability to purchase real estate and hire a scribe[2] suggests that Jeremiah had some personal wealth. A scribe named Baruch copied and compiled his dictated messages.[3]

Jeremiah primarily ministered to his own people in Judah, though he also prophesied regarding surrounding nations. **More than any other prophet, Jeremiah's messages uniquely entwined historical events with his personal life.** The book contains narrative historical accounts as well as prophetic declarations. Jeremiah's writings also grant transparent access into his own turmoil.[4] Though appointed by God, Jeremiah was rejected by the people God sent him to serve. He lived a life of ongoing conflict. Jeremiah faithfully confronted Judah's corrupt leaders.[5] He pled with his countrymen to repent and predicted God's coming judgment through an invading enemy.[6] Jeremiah's book contains more words than any other book in the Bible, perhaps reflecting his lengthy service and unwavering message for God's people.

Jeremiah agonized fiercely as he shouldered, internalized, and even personified the weightiness of his prophetic messages. He endured ostracism, arrest, and imprisonment.[7] The people of his own village threatened his life.[8] He was publicly humiliated and forced from his homeland.[9] Jeremiah was even thrown into a deep and muddy pit.[10] He faced deep anguish and heartache throughout his ministry.

Because of his painful journey and weighty message, Jeremiah is often known as "the weeping prophet."[11] He also wrote Lamentations, which records his woeful cries over Jerusalem's destruction. Did Jeremiah have an unusually melancholy disposition or a need to constantly verbalize his grief? Jeremiah's plight does not exhibit weakness or faintness of heart. Rather, Jeremiah's enduring strength through multiplied years of intense hardship revealed the resiliency and strength of his character. **Jeremiah suffered greatly yet remained faithful to God for as long as he lived.** Jeremiah clung to God as he walked the path God marked out for him. Much can be learned from Jeremiah's steadfast obedience.

1: Another Hilkiah: 2 Kings 22:8
2: Real estate: Jeremiah 32:6-15
3: Baruch: Jeremiah 36:4; 45:1
4: Jeremiah's turmoil: Jeremiah 15:17-18
5: Condemnation of leaders: Jeremiah 5:13, 30-31; 6:13-15; 22:1-5, 11-14; 23:1-4
6: Invading enemy: Jeremiah 1:13-15; 4:5-6; 6:1, 22; 10:22; 13:20; 15:12; 16:15; 20:4-6; 21:2-10; 23:8; 24:1-5
7: Arrested and imprisoned: Jeremiah 37:16
8: Threatened in Anathoth: Jeremiah 11:18-23
9: Taken to Egypt: Jeremiah 41:16-18; 43:1-7
10: Thrown in cistern: Jeremiah 38:6
11: Weeping: Jeremiah 9:1; 13:17; 14:17

Imagery in the Book of Jeremiah

Jeremiah spoke clear words against outright sin. He also utilized images, even personally acting out expressions of God's message for the people. Illustrations or object lessons such as these listed below add emotion, depth, and color to the stark messages Jeremiah communicated.

- He bought, wore, and buried a linen belt (likely an undergarment) to symbolize Judah's adultery. – 13:1-11
- He never married, by God's command and likely in view of dire circumstances awaiting his nation. – 16:1-4
- He went to a potter to see a marred and remade clay object symbolizing Judah's destruction and hope. – 18:1-12
- He symbolically broke a clay jar to foretell Judah's coming disaster. – 19
- He saw a vision of two baskets of figs (good and bad) as an encouraging symbol regarding Judah's exiles. – 24
- He wore a yoke on his neck to illustrate submission to Babylon as God's instrument of judgment. – 27–28
- He purchased land, likely to express confidence in God's restoration of the land and people. – 32:6-44
- He buried stones in Egypt to foretell Babylon's defeat of Egypt. – 43:8-13

The Times of Jeremiah – 1:2-3

Jeremiah's ministry took place in an age of crisis. He served more than 40 years, approximately from 627-586 B.C. and under five Judean kings: Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. As one of God's final preexilic prophets, Jeremiah painstakingly proclaimed the imminence of God's judgment and the urgency of the people's repentance. He ministered before, during, and after Jerusalem's fall to Babylon. Jeremiah personally experienced the devastation of exile. The narratives of 2 Kings 21–25 and 2 Chronicles 33–36 reflect the historical background surrounding Jeremiah's ministry.

Judah's spiritual condition reached an all-time low during the years of Jeremiah's ministry. Flagrant idolatry and child sacrifice, promoted under Judah's kings Ahaz[12] and Manasseh,[13] progressed across the land. Religious insincerity, adultery, injustice, slander, and dishonesty prevailed among the people. Politically, Assyria's power was on the decline, culminating in the destruction of Nineveh in 612 B.C. Subsequently, the Neo-Babylonian empire increasingly gained power. The path God orchestrated took shape as nations aligned to carry out His promised judgment. Against the backdrop of this landscape, God called young Jeremiah to declare His words of truth. Judgment was coming. Repentance was urgent.

12: Ahaz: 2 Kings 16:1-20; 2 Chronicles 28
13: Manasseh: 2 Kings 21:1-18; 2 Chronicles 33:1-20

Jeremiah's Call – 1:4-19

The book of Jeremiah opens with God's commission to Jeremiah. God used beautiful words, vibrant images, and a unique personal experience to tailor His call to this young prophet-to-be. All that Jeremiah heard and felt helped him understand the realities of his divine appointment. This pivotal experience prepared Jeremiah for a tough ministry ahead. How many times through his life did Jeremiah remember God's calm reassurance in this moment? God knows what His servants need to develop their faith and empower their obedience.

God's Choice – 1:4-10

God chose Jeremiah for his assignment before he was born. He determined that Jeremiah would declare a specific message to specific people living at a specific time in history. Jeremiah heard these words: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart...." The Hebrew word yāda', translated "knew" in Jeremiah 1:5, conveys far more than intellectual knowledge. Yāda' expresses personal commitment. In Genesis 4:1, yāda' describes the intimate relations between a husband and his wife. In Amos 3:2, yāda' portrays God's commitment to His people, Israel. Here, God intentionally communicated His personal commitment to Jeremiah as He appointed him a prophet to the nations. God remains purposefully and intimately involved with His chosen people today.

God's absolute knowledge and sovereignty exposes human weakness. Despite God's reassuring words, Jeremiah hesitated. He replied to God, verbalizing his sense of inadequacy: "Alas, Sovereign LORD, ... I do not know how to speak; I am too young." **God countered Jeremiah's doubts with powerful reassurance.** "Do not say, 'I am too young.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you." Recognizing human limitations prepares God's servants to depend on Him and not their own resources.

The Lord reached out his hand and touched Jeremiah's mouth, promising His provision precisely where Jeremiah felt inadequate. God would fill Jeremiah's mouth with His words. Jeremiah was not the only prophet to experience this awareness of need and God's promise of provision. Moses acknowledged his stammering speech.[14] God similarly touched Isaiah and Ezekiel when called to prophetic ministry.[15]

God personally confirmed His involvement and identification with Jeremiah and his work. Jeremiah heard God speak words that crystallized his entire ministry: "See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."

God's Charge – 1:11-19

God illustrated His charge to Jeremiah through two visions. First, Jeremiah saw the branch of an almond tree. Just as the early-blooming almond tree signaled the start of spring, Jeremiah's message would awaken the fulfillment of the judgment God promised. Second, Jeremiah envisioned a boiling pot tilting toward him from the north. This image symbolized the coming invasion from Judah's northern enemy – Babylon. God called Jeremiah, from the start of his ministry, to proclaim these hard truths and promised to protect and preserve him along the way.

14: Moses' inadequacy: Exodus 3:1–4:17
15: Isaiah and Ezekiel: Isaiah 6:6-7; Ezekiel 2:9–3:3

Jeremiah's Personal Sufferings – 34–45

Jeremiah's book flows between historical narrative and prophetic declarations. **Chapters 34–45 and 52 contain accounts of Jeremiah's suffering during the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem.** These chapters offer the historical background to Jeremiah's prophecy and ministry, which we will continue to explore in this lesson and the next.

Before Jerusalem's Fall – 34–38

Jeremiah recalled the overt failures of Judah's King Zedekiah and recorded the backstory of events under one of Zedekiah's predecessors, Jehoiakim. **Jeremiah remained actively involved with King Zedekiah, who embodied the very evil for which Judah was judged.** When King Jehoiachin was taken to Babylon, Zedekiah was appointed to rule Judah by the Babylonian king.[16] Zedekiah propagated evil and led the people further astray.

With the noise of Babylon's invading troops rumbling in their ears, Jeremiah warned wicked King Zedekiah that the city would fall, and he would be taken captive. **Zedekiah failed to heed this warning, but everything Jeremiah predicted came to pass.**[17]

Judah's kings did not welcome Jeremiah's messages from God. King Jehoiakim burned a scroll on which Baruch recorded Jeremiah's dictated warnings. **Jeremiah's plight intensified as Zedekiah continued to ignore the Lord's warnings.**

Jeremiah's adversities intensified as he continued to have private audiences with rebellious Zedekiah. He was beaten and thrown into prison. **Despite personal suffering, Jeremiah refused to relent in speaking God's true message concerning Judah's dismal future.**

Accused of seeking the harm of his countrymen, Jeremiah was thrown into a muddy cistern – a pit used to collect water. He was left to starve to death. **God showed mercy to His downtrodden prophet.** A Cushite man named Ebed-Melek rescued Jeremiah. He even provided rags to put under Jeremiah's arms while he was pulled from the muddy pit with ropes. Scripture's record of this small demonstration of kindness speaks encouragement to us. God often expresses His tender mercy and intimate care in tangible ways that we will notice. Even as we suffer, God stokes the fire of our faith by providing what we need most.

During Jerusalem's Fall – 39

Babylonian forces eventually broke through Jerusalem's walls and conquered the city. **On the very day God ordained, enemy forces captured Zedekiah and took Jerusalem's citizens captive to Babylon.** Interestingly, Nebuchadnezzar instructed his commander to spare Jeremiah, who was released from prison and allowed to stay with his own people. Amid this terror, God spoke a message to Jeremiah for Ebed-Melek "...you will not be given into the hands of those you fear. I will save you; you will not fall by the sword but will escape with your life, because you trust in me, declares the Lord." God's faithful may suffer, but He sees what His people endure. God can be trusted when obedience becomes costly.

16: Zedekiah as king: 2 Kings 24:15-19; 2 Chronicles 36:10-14
17: Prophecy against Zedekiah and fulfillment: Jeremiah 32:1-5; 52:7-11

God's Purifying Process to Transform His People

The Doctrine of Sanctification

Jeremiah suffered greatly as he obediently spoke for God. How do we explain Jeremiah's fortitude and resiliency? Only God could have equipped and strengthened Jeremiah to persevere as he did. Jeremiah lived centuries before Christ completed His work of salvation on the cross. Today, people who put their faith in Jesus' atoning sacrifice are delivered from the eternal punishment their sin deserves. Along with the eternal benefits of salvation, God begins a purifying work within the life of every believer. **Sanctification is the process of ongoing spiritual growth that God initiates within His children.** God's involvement in a believer's life incorporates more than forgiving past sin and providing eternal hope. God actively involves Himself in the day-to-day walk of every believer.

Through the power of His Holy Spirit, God uses life's circumstances, His Word, and His people to make His children more like His Son. God works within us to accomplish what pleases Him. The Holy Spirit changes a believer's appetites so that pleasing Him matters more than what we desire. This divine work helps God's children seek the unseen treasures of eternity. God works within believers to reveal specific sin and gives the power to obey Him from the heart.

To fail to recognize God's purposefully purifying plan in the moments and days of life is to miss an amazing blessing. **Whether celebrating or suffering, focusing only on the momentary joys and pains ignores God's greater purposes for us.** Jeremiah may not have understood God's full plan while he languished in mud up to his armpits. However, God was accomplishing more than Jeremiah realized. God is always doing more than we perceive.

God has sanctifying, purifying, and positive purposes in everything you face. When you do not have the strength to pray, God is at work. He remains faithfully present when your questions outstrip your answers. God draws near when life's difficulties become overwhelming. When you experience anything in life that loosens your grip on this world and its fleeting charms, God is teaching you that He is worthy of your trust. Your sanctification does not depend on your fortitude and resilience. Rather, your sanctification relies on God's strength. He accomplishes what we cannot. When you look back over your life, how has your dependence on God grown? Do you increasingly love what He loves and hate what He hates? As you journey through life, God's Holy Spirit will help you love Jesus more than you enjoy sin. **God sanctifies His children as they walk in this world.**

After's Jerusalem's Fall – 40–45

Jeremiah was later taken captive to Egypt. Undeterred, he continued to speak for the Lord. Jeremiah prophesied against Egypt as he navigated this grueling path. Removed from Jerusalem and held against his will, Jeremiah braved the misery he predicted for Judah. **Harsh circumstances and a hard message did not deter Jeremiah from fulfilling God's call.** Suffering often wears people down when one grief piles upon another. We cannot persevere through compounded hardship by merely bolstering our human strength. Instead, God calls His people to rely on Him when hardships test their resolve. God receives the glory when He does what we cannot.

Jeremiah's Message – Jeremiah 2–33; 46–52

Jeremiah's message, which we will study closely in our next lesson, mirrored that of Isaiah and other preexilic prophets. These men preached to the same wayward people in the same turbulent times. Jeremiah's message to Judah can be easily encapsulated in three points:

- You have broken God's covenant by your sins of idolatry, injustice, and empty religion.
- Judgment is coming. Repent!
- Hope exists beyond judgment. God will restore what sin has destroyed.

Jeremiah's Major Themes

- **God Himself:** The promise-keeping God cannot tolerate sin but stands ready to restore what sin has destroyed. The presence, power, and purposes of God cannot be ignored.
- **Divine judgment:** Israel and Judah broke their covenant with God and awaited His promised judgment. God is too holy to allow sin to go unpunished.
- **Repentance:** God offers a way of hope and restoration for all who turn from their wicked ways and to Him for salvation. God's heart is compassionate toward sinners; He longs for us to turn to Him.
- **The new covenant:** Israel broke their covenant with God. God has provided a new way for sinners to find hope and restoration through His Son.
- **Hope of future restoration:** Despite Israel's sin, God promises a day of future restoration and hope to His wayward people. People who turn to God face a bright future.

Jeremiah's personal life and prophetic message were woven together against the backdrop of Judah's impending exile. He foretold and lived through God's judgment. Jeremiah shared God's burden for His people and spoke His message to them faithfully. Like Jeremiah, God continues to equip Christians to stand for Him in a world where most people reject or ignore Him. **God calls His children to share His burdens, speak His message, and trust Him with the results.** The people of Judah failed to respond to Jeremiah's warnings. God's judgment came, just as He promised. The future restoration of God's people that Jeremiah promised remains just as certain. Speaking and living for God is right, even when it means standing against the crowd. When faithfulness is costly for God's servants, He supplies the strength needed to persevere and sanctifies His children through the process. God can be trusted.

Outline of Jeremiah

I. Jeremiah's call – 1

II. Messages to Judah – 2–33

  A. Condemnation – 2–29

  B. Consolation – 30–33

III. Jeremiah's Personal Sufferings – 34–45

  A. Before Jerusalem's Fall – 34–38

  B. During Jerusalem's Fall – 39

  C. After Jerusalem's Fall – 40–45

IV. Messages to the Nations – 46–51

V. Jerusalem's Fall – 52

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

God shines His light into dark places. When God's people descended into flagrant idolatry and refused to repent, He sent prophet after prophet to Israel and Judah with urgent pleas and stark warnings. **God called Jeremiah to speak for Him during Judah's final hours.** God's commission as a prophet to the nations humbled Jeremiah, who immediately felt the weight of human fear because of his youthfulness and inexperience. God touched Jeremiah's mouth and promised He would show him where to go and tell him what to say. His message and ministry would be to "uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant" (Jeremiah 1:10). The long and difficult path God planned for Jeremiah would be accomplished by God's power alone.

God's assignment for Jeremiah came with personal suffering. Jeremiah's passionate and uncompromised delivery of God's messages brought hatred and persecution from those he confronted. **Despite personal anguish, Jeremiah spoke boldly for God for more than 40 years.** He repeatedly delivered warnings of judgment, a call to repentance, and promises of restoration beyond the exile. Though he was a faithful prophet called by God, Jeremiah was not spared from witnessing and experiencing the devastation that came with God's judgment.

Apply It

God knew Jeremiah before He formed him within his mother's womb. Jeremiah's divine appointment originated before he drew a breath or spoke a word. God also knows you intimately. He has ordained

specific purposes for you and your life.[18] Like Jeremiah, the thought of serving God or speaking for Him can make us shrink back in fear. What makes you feel ill-prepared or inadequate to do great things for God? Realizing what we are not helps us face the reality of who God is. **A healthy assessment of our deficiencies prepares us to trust God to do what we cannot.** We need to know that God's work depends on His strength, not ours. Anything we have to offer God, He has supplied.[19] What is God asking you to do for Him? What is holding you back? The God who knows you completely and loves you perfectly desires to use you for His glory.

Jeremiah's resiliency and steadfast obedience challenge and inspire us. God called him to a task that promised to be tough. God revealed to Jeremiah the peril awaiting Judah but did not shield His faithful servant from the harm that fell upon his countrymen. He carried a spiritual burden few could bear. God's children do not live in a bubble – spared from the pain and wreckage of this fallen world. Christians live under evil governments and through bitter wars. In fact, Christian persecution will escalate as history moves towards Christ's return.[20] **God has positioned you in a world, city, neighborhood, and even a family with great spiritual needs.** As you share in the hurt of the fallen world, how will you respond? Do you seek to escape the pain? Like Jeremiah, are you willing to walk toward and through hardship in answer to God's call? How is God leading you to reach out to those who may be unaware of the spiritual peril they face? If our comfort were God's primary concern, He would immediately transport us to heaven. Instead, God leaves us here to make a difference. What comfort are you willing to forsake to obey God?

Life in this world is hard, but God promises a bright future for those who seek Him. Jeremiah held out hope, even as he foretold coming trauma. In many ways, this world's hardships awaken our longing for the resolution and restoration God promises. Hope comes as a precious gift from God. For the believer, Christ has provided salvation from sin's just penalty. Present suffering pales when compared to eternal glory.[21] God's children can experience His peace and presence, even while walking in a world filled with trouble.[22] Believers face illness and death with certain hope beyond the grave. We are promised a future time when evil's reign of terror will end, and sorrow will be no more.[23] The future hope God gives His children permeates their present lives and transcends outward circumstances. Do you struggle to find hope in this world? Those who put their faith in Christ have certain comfort beyond this world's pain. How will you allow God's truth and hope to fill you today?

18: God's purposes: Ephesians 2:10
19: Serving in God's strength: Colossians 1:29; 1 Peter 4:11
20: Hardship for believers: Luke 21:12-18; 2 Timothy 3:12-13
21: Eternal glory: 2 Corinthians 4:17
22: Transcending peace: John 16:33; Philippians 4:7
23: No more suffering: Revelation 21:3-5

All Scripture quotations in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ® NIV ®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Jeremiah Part 2 – Judgment, Restoration, and the New Covenant

Jeremiah 2–33; 46–52

Lesson Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 25 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the lecture help you understand and apply lessons from Jeremiah's life and mission?

2. What truth from the notes spoke most directly to you this week? Why were those thoughts particularly impactful?

Second Day: Read the selected passages from Jeremiah 2–29 listed below.

Jeremiah exposed Israel and Judah's sin.

Note: Jeremiah 2–29 contains 14 messages written to Judah before the exile regarding Judah's sin and coming judgment. The questions on the second and third days focus on the major themes within this lengthy section.

3. a. Jeremiah repeated the accusations and warnings of other prophets we have studied. What specific sins against God by the people of Judah did Jeremiah expose in the following passages?

   Jeremiah 2:23-25; 3:13

© BSF 2022 (This material may be downloaded from mybsf.org and used by BSF class members in connection with their personal BSF class studies. It may not be otherwise reproduced without BSF's written permission.)

Jeremiah 5:13, 30-31; 23:10b-11

Jeremiah 5:26-28; 7:5-11

b. Why should God's people acknowledge and repent from specific sins, not just their general sinfulness?

c. How have you experienced God's redemptive work in your life regarding patterns of specific sin?

4. a. Describe Jeremiah's attitude as he exposed the sins of his countrymen (see Jeremiah 4:19-21; 8:21–9:2).

b. What are some right and wrong ways Christians can communicate the truth about sin and judgment?

5. Read Jeremiah 18:1-11. What truths about God, His heart, and His ways do you learn from this passage?

Third Day: Read the selected passages from Jeremiah 4–29 and 46–51 listed below.

Jeremiah announced the specifics of the coming judgment.

6. a. What facts did Jeremiah foretell about God's judgment on Judah (see Jeremiah 4:6; 13:18-20; 20:4-6; 25:8-14)?

b. Which facts did you find significant in Jeremiah's prophecy? Why?

7. How did Jeremiah describe the suffering that would accompany God's judgment (see Jeremiah 6:1-7; 11:22; 12:12-13)?

8. a. Skim Jeremiah 46–51 and list the surrounding nations that would also face a Babylonian attack.

   b. Read Jeremiah 51:34-35. Why might this message have comforted the people of Judah?

Fourth Day: Read Jeremiah 30–33.

In the middle of warnings regarding the coming disaster, Jeremiah proclaimed hope and restoration for God's people.

9. a. From Jeremiah 30:1–31:30, in what ways did God promise to restore His people?

   b. Why would these promises encourage the people of Judah at this point in their history and beyond?

10. a. Israel broke the covenant they made with God through Moses (see Exodus 19:3-6; 24:1-8; Deuteronomy 29:1–30:3). Considering their failure, what amazing promise did God make through Jeremiah in 31:31-37?

    b. How do Christians today experience the reality of this promise (see 2 Corinthians 3:3-6; Hebrews 7:18-22; 8:8-13; 10:15-17)?

c. In what ways has God expanded your personal appreciation of this promise?

11. What specific encouragement did God extend to His people through Jeremiah's purchase of a field in chapter 32?

Fifth Day: Read Jeremiah 52.

Jeremiah experienced the devastating fall of Jerusalem.

12. a. Describe the Babylonian attack on Jerusalem. How were the citizens impacted?

b. What happened to King Zedekiah?

c. Why was the desecration of the temple particularly devastating?

13. The details Jeremiah predicted came to pass. Why is this important?

14. What is the significance of Jeremiah's final words regarding Judah's King Jehoiachin?

Sixth Day: Review Jeremiah's messages of judgment and hope.

Only God can make new what sin has broken.

15. What is the clearest message God spoke to you through the book of Jeremiah?

Passage Discovery (homiletics, word study, etc.) for Group and Administrative Leaders: Jeremiah 30–33

Lecture Notes

Next step: Read Lesson Notes.

Lesson Notes

Jeremiah 2–33; 46–52

Focus Verse

"'The days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.'" – Jeremiah 31:31

Outline

- The Declaration Against Judah – Jeremiah 2–33
- The Decrees Against the Nations – Jeremiah 46–51
- The Destruction of Jerusalem – Jeremiah 52

Engage

How do you fix what is badly broken? We can repair or replace a defective household appliance or repair a shattered window. We can seek counseling or mediation to mend torn relationships. However, humanity faces pervasive spiritual brokenness with deeply damaging results. Sin corrupted creation's perfection, impacting individuals, nations, and society at large. We often fail to connect the world's dysfunction with the systemic damage wrought by sin. Understanding sin's destruction makes us long for God to bridge sin's breach, as He has promised to do. **Sin's destruction can only be repaired by God Himself.**

Israel and Judah rebelliously broke their covenant with God in multiple ways. They worshiped false gods, mistreated one another, and perpetuated empty worship rituals without true heart commitment to God. Despite their sin, God relentlessly communicated with His wayward people who had His laws but needed a change of heart. He continued to call them back to Himself even as they marched toward and through intense judgment. Though Jeremiah's book resounds with warnings, a powerful theme of hope also arises. God promised a new covenant that would fulfill and extend the old covenant they had broken. Through faith in Christ, believers experience the wonders of the new covenant God promised through Jeremiah. **Only God can make new what sin has broken.** The comfort Jeremiah offered to Israel extends to God's people today.

The Declaration Against Judah – Jeremiah 2–33

Jeremiah ministered faithfully for nearly 40 difficult years – before, during, and after the fall of Jerusalem and Judah's exile to Babylon. Through intense warnings, object lessons, visions, and other visual demonstrations of his message, Jeremiah consistently called God's people to repentance. His unpopular and confrontational message caused him personal suffering. He was threatened, put

in stocks, beaten, jailed, thrown into a cistern, and eventually taken captive to Egypt.[1] Despite the costliness of obedience, Jeremiah persevered in preaching God's Word to people who persistently rejected God Himself. Deep within Jeremiah's lengthy message of condemnation lies a thread of encouraging consolation and enduring hope.

Condemnation – 2–29

Jeremiah began with 14 messages to Judah concerning God's coming judgment. **Written before the exile, Jeremiah exposed in detail how Israel failed to live as God's people and broke their covenant with God.** As a result, the nation faced a grim future. Jeremiah carried a weighty burden of personal anguish over the guilt and future of his nation.[2] He did not proclaim cold, hard facts with a stony heart. Jeremiah's personal example of delivering painful truth with anguish and a quiver in his voice sets an example for us. God compels believers to share the certainty of God's coming judgment, but with compassion and a tearful, pleading heart.

Jeremiah clearly understood and articulated God's righteous character, just judgment, and the people's guilt alongside the restoration available for all who turned to God in repentance. The primary features and themes presented regarding God's just actions against Judah prove helpful in understanding Jeremiah's passionate message.

God's merciful desire for His people to repent and to restore their relationship with Him is evidenced by the many prophets He sent to Israel and Judah. The various prophets brought the same basic plea – each with a different focus to prompt God's people to hear and respond. The continuous messages spoken by God's prophets and recorded in the Bible continue to speak to believers today. The hope they promised found its ultimate fulfilment in the suffering and death of the Lord Jesus, who fulfilled the old covenant and mediates a new covenant for us.

Jeremiah Confronted Sin

"But my people have exchanged their glorious God for worthless idols." – Jeremiah 2:11b

With a similar theme as the prophet Hosea, Jeremiah condemned Israel's rampant idolatry as spiritual adultery, prostitution, and promiscuity.[3] Pervasive idolatry even led to the despicable practice of child sacrifice.[4]

Jeremiah also exposed Israel's leaders for their evil ways and failure to lead God's people as He intended.[5] The corruption that permeated Israel's prophets, priests, and kings led the nation into tragic injustice against one another. Exploiting the people God endowed them to protect, these leaders preyed on widows, orphans, and foreigners.[6]

1: Jeremiah's suffering: Jeremiah 11:18-23; 19:14–20:2; 26:7-24; 37:15; 38:6; 40:1; 43:1-7
2: Jeremiah's anguish: Jeremiah 9:1; 13:17; 14:17; 15:17-18
3: Spiritual adultery: Jeremiah 2:23-25; 3:1-9; 5:7-9; Hosea 1:2; 2:2
4: Child sacrifice: Jeremiah 19:5; 32:35
5: Condemnation of Israel's leaders: Jeremiah 5:13, 30-31; 6:13-15; 22:1-5, 11-14; 23:1-4
6: Oppression: Jeremiah 5:26-29; 7:1-15; 22:13-19

Jeremiah's Warnings of Disaster

"Therefore the LORD Almighty says this: 'Because you have not listened to my words, I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon,' declares the LORD, 'and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin.'" – Jeremiah 25:8-9

A Specific Enemy

Jeremiah foretold God's design to use a foreign nation as His instrument of righteous judgment. Jeremiah's prophecy spanned many years, so the threat of the Babylonian empire escalated during his ministry. Initially, Jeremiah repeatedly mentioned a threat from the north that would bring disaster upon Judah.[7]

When Jeremiah identified the enemy from the north as Babylon, his prediction gained clarity.[8] At a pivotal time in Judah – during the fourth year of Jehoiakim's reign in Judah and the first year of King Nebuchadnezzar's reign in Babylon – the facts came into focus.[9]

For 23 years, Judah stubbornly ignored Jeremiah's warnings and aroused God's anger. God's people awaited judgment they brought upon themselves. **In a bold pronouncement, Jeremiah declared that "God's servant" – Nebuchadnezzar – would come against the land, its inhabitants, and surrounding nations.[10]** This announcement came prior to Babylon's first attack on Judah.[11]

Summoned by God Himself, these northern peoples and armies would render Judah a desolate wasteland. **God also determined the amount of time His people remained under Babylonian domination – 70 years.[12]** Almighty God accomplishes His divine purposes in myriad ways. Kings and kingdoms rise and fall at God's command. Governments and kings who do not acknowledge God unknowingly fulfill His plans. God orchestrates human history. Even so, nations and people remain accountable to Him for their evil deeds.

Severe Suffering

Repeated warnings from Jeremiah contained vivid descriptions of the severe physical suffering that the people would endure. **Jeremiah agonized in personal pain as he forecast the reality facing his nation.** He cried out, "Oh, my anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain. Oh, the agony of my heart! My heart pounds within me, I cannot keep silent. For I have heard the sound of the trumpet; I have heard the battle cry. Disaster follows disaster; the whole land lies in ruins" (Jeremiah 4:19-20a).

Key words describing the gravity of suffering awaiting Judah appear often in Jeremiah's warnings. He spoke of *famine*.[13] He described *destruction*.[14] He prophesied that *the sword* of another nation would inflict terrible harm.[15] Jeremiah's bleak and forthright words did not sugarcoat the agony Judah faced.

7: Threat from the north: Jeremiah 1:13-15; 3:11-18; 4:5-6; 6:1, 22; 10:22; 13:20; 15:12; 16:15; 23:8
8: Babylon: Jeremiah 20:4-6; 21:2-10; 24:1-5
9: Timing of Babylon's rise: Jeremiah 25
10: God's servant Nebuchadnezzar: Jeremiah 25:8-14
11: Jeremiah's suffering in Jerusalem: Jeremiah 26-29
12: Babylonian domination: Jeremiah 25:12
13: Famine: Jeremiah 11:22; 14:1-6, 12-18; 16:4; 18:21; 21:7; 24:10; 27:8, 13; 29:17-18
14: Destruction: Jeremiah 4:6; 6:1-7; 10:17-18; 20:8
15: Sword: Jeremiah 4:10; 5:17; 6:25; 9:16; 11:22; 12:12; 14:12-18; 15:3, 9; 16:4; 18:21; 19:7; 21:9; 25:16

Judah had reached the point of no return; God's judgment would bring devastating results. Jeremiah summarized the Lord's determined discipline on His rebellious people: "Then the LORD said to me: 'Even if Moses and Samuel were to stand before me, my heart would not go out to this people. Send them away from my presence! Let them go!'" (Jeremiah 15:1). God's people remain accountable to Him.

The Call to Repentance

"If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned." – Jeremiah 18:7

Throughout his ministry, Jeremiah's message was overwhelmingly sobering. Chapter by chapter and year after year, he personally struggled under the weight of the ominous truth he proclaimed on God's behalf. **As he reflected God's justice and judgment, Jeremiah upheld God's compassionate desire to restore the repentant.** If the nation listened and returned to God, disaster could be averted. Jeremiah extended God's offer. He urged the people to choose God and follow His ways. "This is what the LORD says: See, I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death" (Jeremiah 21:8).

The Hope of Restoration

"'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.'" – Jeremiah 29:11-12

Chapters 26–29 record Jeremiah's suffering during the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem. In chapter 29, Jeremiah wrote a letter from Jerusalem to those held captive in Babylon. This important passage teaches God's people how to engage with an unbelieving society. Jeremiah encouraged the exiles to bless their Babylonian neighbors and to flourish spiritually and physically while living in a foreign land. Jeremiah promised that at the end of 70 years of captivity, God would bring them back to the land. Even during exceedingly difficult circumstances, God's children can thrive under His faithful care. God's life and light shine through His people when they trust Him and yield to His purposes, no matter their challenges.

God's plans prevail. **The people of Judah would survive the exile and return to their homeland!** Until God calls His people home, they are to bless and serve their neighbors. When evil appears to have an upper hand, God's promises of His coming kingdom and eternal glory offer hope. Sin does not have the last word.

Consolation – 30–33

After many chapters of intense warnings, Jeremiah's message shifts to one of hope.

The Promise of Restoration

"'The days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will bring my people Israel and Judah back from captivity and restore them to the land I gave their ancestors to possess,' says the LORD." – Jeremiah 30:3

Despite the nation's sin, Israel would be delivered from her enemies, return to the promised land, and experience peace and security. The restoration of the exiled remnant to the promised land later in Israel's history partially fulfilled these promises. Complete fulfillment awaits Christ's second coming. One day in the future, Jesus will establish His kingdom and rule the nations in righteousness. How we long for that day!

The Promise of a New Covenant

"'The days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.'" – Jeremiah 31:31

Israel broke her covenant with God. In a beautiful expression of mercy and grace, God promised a new covenant with His people. Israel's first covenant with God contained commands and prohibitions. God promised blessings if they obeyed Him and remained true to the covenant and curses if they did not. **Unlike the Mosaic covenant, this superior new covenant would bring internal transformation, the forgiveness of sins, and rich knowledge of God Himself.** God's Spirit would rewire people's hearts, enabling them to walk in faith and to know and obey God. This promise of a new covenant spoke to Israel but points to salvation in Christ – available to individuals from all nations and lands. This covenant is available to you! The new covenant does not depend on the obedience of the people, but instead rests in the absolute perfection of Christ and His sinless sacrifice on their behalf.

Many New Testament passages quote and reflect this important passage in Jeremiah.[16] The law God gave Israel through Moses relied on animal sacrifices – insufficient in and of themselves to provide forgiveness from sin.[17] Those who humbled themselves before God in faith found salvation through sacrifices that anticipated a greater and more perfect one in the future. The breakdown of the old covenant did not lie in the covenant itself, but in Israel's refusal to turn from their sin and seek God. The people needed a new, circumcised heart.

Jesus Christ sealed the new covenant with His own blood, bringing salvation to all who put their faith in Him. Jeremiah beautifully describes the glorious forgiveness offered by Christ. "'This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,' declares the LORD. 'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, "Know the LORD," because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,' declares the LORD. 'For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more'" (Jeremiah 31:33-34). Jesus reconciles sinners to God and restores their relationship with Him.

16: New Testament references: Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25; 2 Corinthians 3:3-6; Hebrews 7:18-22; 8:8-13; 10:15-17
17: Insufficient sacrifices: Hebrews 8:8-10

Words of Hope

"Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know." – Jeremiah 33:3

In chapter 32, God instructed Jeremiah to purchase a field while he was imprisoned within the royal palace and Nebuchadnezzar's army besieged Jerusalem. Jeremiah directed the placement of the purchase deeds in a sealed jar to symbolize God's promise to restore His people to their land. This visible step of obedience showed his faith in God's promise, despite outwardly dismal circumstances. God encouraged His faithful prophet, saying, "I am the LORD, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?" (Jeremiah 32:27).

Still confined to the king's courtyard, Jeremiah continued to receive encouraging promises from God. The very place battered by the enemy army would one day thrive with flocks and people. **God's glorious promises point to Jesus, the Messiah, who would come to fulfill God's plan for Israel and humankind.** The "righteous Branch" that would "sprout from David's line" would bring righteousness.[18] God called Jeremiah and the people to believe His promise of future restoration and hold onto hope even while enemy troops attacked the city.

The Decrees Against the Nations – Jeremiah 46–51

A collection of poems recorded by Jeremiah described the suffering of Israel's surrounding nations under Babylon's onslaught. God's judgment falls, not just on His own people, but all people and nations. Jeremiah's proclamations started with Egypt, a perpetual enemy of God's people. Additional oracles were delivered against the Philistines; Moab; Ammon; Edom; Damascus, the capital of Syria; Kedar and Hazor; and Elam.

Jeremiah expressed God's coming retribution against Babylon in his longest and last message (50–51). **God used Babylon to render His just judgment against evil; the conquering nation would also face God as judge.** Jeremiah described Babylon's fall as sudden. The Medes and Persians overthrew Babylon in 539 B.C. This prophecy also points to a far future day. Babylon, a frequent biblical symbol of organized evil, will one day fatally and finally fall under the righteous reign of Messiah.[19]

The Destruction of Jerusalem – Jeremiah 52

Serving as God's prophet, Jeremiah's ministry spanned many years and many kings. He witnessed the escalation of evil in Judah and the rise of the Babylonian empire. He experienced the dreadful and devastating moments when Jerusalem fell. **Jeremiah's personal experience through the terror of the Babylonian invasion impacted him greatly.** The book of Lamentations, the focus of our next lesson, captures his personal expressions of deep anguish and lament over the terror he witnessed and experienced.

18: The righteous Branch: Isaiah 4:2; Jeremiah 33:15-16
19: Babylon's evil: Genesis 11:1-9; Revelation 14:8; 18

God Keeps His Promises

The Doctrine of Covenants

Covenants play an important role in the Bible. **Most simply, covenants are promises God makes to an individual or group.** Some covenants, such as God's covenant with Israel through Moses, were conditional – dependent on the people's response.[20] God promised abundant blessings *if* the people obeyed His commands. Other biblical covenants stood on God's unchangeable commitments to fulfill His promises. God's vow to make Abraham's offspring into a great nation and land rested on God's resolve to form and deliver His people.[21]

Jeremiah laid out multiple ways Israel and Judah failed to keep God's conditional covenant. He described God's judgment under the Babylonians that God had promised if the people disobeyed – and they did. However, Jeremiah foretold something new and wonderful alongside the difficulties he announced. He previewed a God-initiated new covenant – a shining truth that the New Testament expands. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection secured the way of salvation for all who put their faith in Him. God declares everyone who turns to Jesus in faith as righteous in His sight. Indwelt by the Holy Spirit, believers experience the power and desire to seek and please God. Obedience to God flows out of love and gratitude, as God's Spirit empowers His children to think and act rightly. **Because of the new covenant, every true believer rests secure in Christ – no strings attached.**

To disregard God's promises in the Bible means missing the only source of true security known to mankind. God's promises are inextricably linked to His character. Therefore, to ignore His promises is to neglect God Himself. There is no way of salvation apart from what God has promised and accomplished. To ignore God is to opt out of His blessings. **An anchorless life and dismal future await anyone who refuses to believe what God has declared to be certain.**

God did not leave desperate people in the dark searching for answers that He cunningly withheld. **God made promises – secured by who He is – that cannot be broken by the certain failures of sinful people.** The old covenant paved the way for the new covenant, which represents unshakable hope available to everyone who puts their faith in Christ. Believers need not wonder if they have been good enough to please God. Because of what Christ accomplished, God's children remain settled and secure on God's promises, which cannot be broken. There is no better place to rest!

Jerusalem's Terror

Chapter 52 parallels 2 Kings 24:18–25:30 and Jeremiah 32–33, recording the Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem and the exile of God's people. **This narrative verifies not only the events, but also**

20: Mosaic covenant: Exodus 19:3-6; 24:1-8; Deuteronomy 29:1–30:3
21: Abrahamic covenant: Genesis 12:1-3

confirms the fulfillment of Jeremiah's God-given prophetic declarations throughout his ministry. Zedekiah ascended to Judah's throne when then-king Jehoiachin was taken captive.[22] During the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, the Babylonian army surrounded Jerusalem. Severe famine gripped the city, and the people endured great hardship.

Jerusalem's fall was brutal and bloody. King Zedekiah witnessed the assassination of his own sons before his enemies gouged out his eyes and took him to Babylon. The invading army breached Jerusalem's walls, then ravaged and burned the city. Temple treasures were stolen and taken to Babylon. The Babylonian forces deported the people of Judah in several stages. Groups of exiles were taken to Babylon three times during King Nebuchadnezzar's reign, with only a few poor people left to tend the land.

Jehoiachin's Release

Jeremiah's book concludes with an unexpected but significant detail regarding King Jehoiachin (also called Jeconiah) of Judah, who reigned three months before being taken captive.[23] **Babylon's king brought Jehoiachin out of prison and granted him the privilege of dining regularly at his royal table.** Why would Jeremiah's long and important book end with this unusual detail? Why would a foreign king allow this deposed king such an honor?

This flicker of hope rises at the end of Jeremiah's account of judgment and destruction by God's design. Jeremiah reminds us that God had not forgotten His exiled people or the Messianic line of David. This dining arrangement reinforces Jeremiah's prophecy regarding the new covenant and the future restoration awaiting God's people. **Only God can make new what sin has broken.** Judah and Israel broke their covenant with God. People throughout the ages have been surrounded by are surrounded by pervasive brokenness caused by sin. Only God can repair what sin has destroyed. Turning to Christ for salvation provides the only source of true hope and restoration.

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Like other prophets, Jeremiah confronted Judah and Israel's sin and idolatry. He spelled out the damage caused by their spiritual adultery and rebellion against God. Jeremiah enumerated the specific sins of Israel's leaders, who failed to guide the people and steward their God-given responsibility. **Israel and Judah awaited God's judgment because they broke their covenant with God.**

With increasing clarity, Jeremiah announced that God's judgment would come in the form of an enemy from the north – Babylon. Acting as God's instrument, this enemy nation would rise in power and inflict painful punishment on the people, land, and surrounding nations. Jeremiah did not deliver this ominous message in a coldhearted or disconnected way. He foretold these dreadful events but also lived through the deadly onslaught himself. Jeremiah delivered agonizing expressions of the impending doom awaiting his nation – both verbally and visually. His unpopular message brought

---

22: Zedekiah as king: 2 Kings 24:15-19; 2 Chronicles 36:10-14
23: King Jehoiachin: 2 Kings 24:5-17; 2 Chronicles 36:8-9; Matthew 1:11

him great suffering. Whenever God challenges people, He also offers hope and restoration if they heed His call. **Along with the bad news, Jeremiah called people to repentance and announced God's good plan beyond Israel's purifying pain.** The historical events he predicted and witnessed were not the final chapter of God's story or plan for Israel.

Apply It

God sent Jeremiah to bear and share a difficult message. People can overlook the sturdiness of character in the man known as the "weeping prophet." Jeremiah faithfully carried a heavy message with integrity and personal empathy. How deeply do we feel the anguish of people in line for God's coming judgment? Jeremiah did the hard thing faithfully and for a very long time. What makes you want to quit? How willing are you to persevere when God's way involves a long and hard road without an easy exit? God pointed Jeremiah to the hope beyond the pain. He carried on, embracing unseen treasures that outweighed the suffering. **A lifetime of faithful service to God is accomplished one day at a time.** Will you faithfully endure – trusting God when the path He marks out for you is harder than you expected?

Christians today live in the middle chapters of a developing story. We recognize that God created the world, sent His Son, and set us on a Spirit-powered walk on earth while we await eternity. Like Israel, we are exiles longing for a better place and more glorious day. However, resolution often feels like a distant dream. Jeremiah experienced more pain than parties. He predicted joyous restoration yet lived through brutal disaster. However, God's plan was not thwarted by Jerusalem's siege. Do you find yourself waiting for a happy ending that seems impossible? Scripture tells us that we see in a mirror dimly – perhaps only cloudy glimpses of coming glory.[24] **People who trust God find hope and stability in God Himself – not in personal ease.** If you feel like God has paused your life in a season of trauma, will you trust Him? How will you fix your gaze on God while you wait on Him to resolve your most challenging situation?

God can repair what sin has destroyed. His story does not end with the brokenness we see and experience. God not only *can* fix sin's damage, but *He delights to do so*. God repeatedly called His people to repent and rest by faith in His provision. His invitation to faith remains open to the world – and to you. He longs for us to run to Him to find comfort, peace, and wholeness. Whether we consider this world's craziness or the sin that lurks in the private corners of our hearts, we know that God does not turn away from our desperate plight. God will bring restorative judgment and uphold justice. But even as He does, He paves a way to make us new. God did a new thing through His Son to free us from sin's bondage.[25] God has planned "great and unsearchable things" that our minds cannot contain and our words cannot express.[26] How will you experience the new life, new hope, and new power God has for you in your daily life? If you know Him, will you continue to walk and trust that He is at your side and has your best interests at heart?

24: Dimly in a mirror: 1 Corinthians 13:12
25: God's new way: Isaiah 43:18-19; Matthew 9:16-17
26: Great and unsearchable: Jeremiah 33:3

All Scripture quotations in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ® NIV ®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Lamentations – Poetic Expressions of Painful Loss

Lamentations

Lesson Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 26 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did God offer you hope and encouragement through the notes?

2. What specific truth from the lecture helped you relate Jeremiah's message to your life today?

Based on traditional scholarship, BSF assumes Jeremiah wrote the book of Lamentations.

Second Day: Read Lamentations 1–2.

Jeremiah lamented his own suffering and that of God's people.

3. Expressions of lament are common throughout the Bible. Consider Job 3:3-26; Psalm 10; and Matthew 23:37-39 as examples.

   a. What does it mean to lament?

© BSF 2022 (This material may be downloaded from mybsf.org and used by BSF class members in connection with their personal BSF class studies. It may not be otherwise reproduced without BSF's written permission.)

b. What important lessons can you draw for your own life from this precedent?

4. Each chapter in Lamentations highlights different pronouns, indicating the unique focus of each lament. Identify the predominant pronouns, to whom each refers, and the primary theme you recognize within each of the first two chapters?

   Chapter 1

   Chapter 2

5. What stands out to you from Jeremiah's agonizing words over his pain and the suffering of God's people?

Third Day: Read Lamentations 3.

Jeremiah recounted his suffering and praised God's faithfulness.

6. Identify the predominant pronouns, to whom each refers, and the primary theme within this chapter.

7. a. Find a phrase or two in chapter 3 that poignantly express Jeremiah's personal turmoil.

   b. How does Jeremiah's focus shift in the middle of this chapter?

   c. What truths about God do you learn from verses 31-39? How does this encourage you?

   d. In what ways does Jeremiah plead his case before the people and God in verses 40-66?

8. What helps you focus on God when you are overwhelmed by a troubling situation?

Fourth Day: Read Lamentations 4.

Jeremiah described the suffering of the people of Jerusalem.

9. a. Identify the predominant pronouns in this chapter and to whom they refer.

   b. Jeremiah compared the state of the people before Jerusalem fell with the current deplorable conditions. From verses 1-10, how were various groups of people traumatized by the city's destruction?

   c. Summarize the theme of this chapter.

10. What words or phrases from verses 11-22 indicate God's response to the sins of His people?

11. How are you helped or troubled when you consider God's judgment?

Fifth Day: Read Lamentations 5.

Jeremiah prayed on behalf of God's people.

12. a. Identify the predominant pronouns in this chapter and to whom they refer. How does this focus reveal Jeremiah's identification with and advocacy for God's suffering people?

    b. What is the primary theme of chapter 5?

13. Jeremiah recounted specific atrocities against the people of Judah. What spiritual or emotional benefits can be gained by identifying or describing our suffering to God?

14. From verses 1-18, what did Jeremiah pray for God to remember about His suffering people?

15. What comfort did Jeremiah seek in verses 19-21? What personal comfort do you draw from these verses?

16. Verse 22 ends the book of Lamentations without a joyful resolution.

    a. In what ways were Jeremiah and God's people waiting for the resolution they desired?

    b. Describe a situation in which you are waiting on God to fulfill His promises. What are you learning about yourself? About God?

Sixth Day: Review Lamentations.

God compassionately hears the anguished cries of His suffering people.

17. What was the most prominent message God spoke to you through your study of Lamentations?

Passage Discovery (homiletics, word study, etc.) for Group and Administrative Leaders: Lamentations

Lecture Notes

Next step: Read Lesson Notes.

Lesson Notes

Lamentations

Focus Verse

"Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." – Lamentations 3:22-23

Outline

- The Need to Lament
- The Message of Lamentations – Lamentations 1–5

Engage

No one can deny the constant barrage of challenges we face in life. Our trials range from passing annoyances to paralyzing anguish. Ignoring pain or suppressing trauma may temporarily bring distraction but cannot offer the relief we desire. We are helped to remember God's infinite knowledge of everything about us. He knows how we think, what we feel, and how best to help us. **God completely understands what we see dimly but feel intensely.** He is not surprised by our emotions or repelled by our neediness. God sees our hardships. He hears our cries and knows when life hurts. We cannot measure God's faithfulness and goodness by the circumstances that cause us grief.

Lamentations records the violent throbs of an aching heart. For many valid reasons, scholars believe the prophet Jeremiah penned these words. He expressed his deep anguish over the unspeakable trauma of Babylon's conquest of Jerusalem. He did not hold back or sugarcoat the pain. Jeremiah knew God would hear and respond to his broken heart. **God compassionately hears the anguished cries of His suffering people.** This tear-stained book helps us know how to acknowledge our pain to a loving, ever-listening God.

The Need to Lament

The Context of Lamentations

Lamentations records a series of poems mourning the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of God's people. Jerusalem's significance to the Israelites within past and future redemptive history cannot be overemphasized. The city of David represented the center of Israel's worship and the pinnacle of God's promises to His people.[1] Jerusalem was God's "chosen city" – the place where He

1: Promises: 2 Kings 19:31

promised to preserve His presence.[2] In 586 B.C., Babylon invaded the royal city, burned the temple, and took its citizens into exile. Though God's prophets foretold this attack as an act of His judgment, the horrific destruction and intense cruelty experienced by God's people left them in utter chaos. This book captures the confusion of a disheartened people.

The Author of Lamentations

Lamentations does not name its author, but scholarly tradition points to Jeremiah as the prophet who penned the book. Jeremiah predicted Jerusalem's destruction, and he lived through the desolation. Emotive expressions reveal Jeremiah's passion for God's people and his painful life experiences. Other Scripture passages declare God's instructions for Jeremiah to record words of lament for His people.[3] The subject matter and writing style within Lamentations parallel the book of Jeremiah.[4] Details regarding Jerusalem's siege alongside the people's suffering line up with Jeremiah's experience of Babylon's devastating onslaught. For the sake of our study, we will assume Jeremiah to be the author of Lamentations.

The Biblical Precedent for Expressing Lament

The Bible encourages hurting people to verbalize hard questions and express profound grief. Job mourned his overwhelming losses.[5] Lament poems abound in the book of Psalms, where as many as one-third of all the Psalms are laments.[6] Many other Scripture passages similarly reflect the human need to lament life's struggles.[7] Jeremiah's heartfelt cries capture not only human woe, but also express certain hope in God despite the difficulties voiced.

Jesus Himself spoke human words to express profound sorrow. While He walked on earth as a sinless man, Jesus witnessed sin's devastation. He wept beside a friend's grave.[8] He suffered rejection and betrayal. Matthew 23:37-39 records Jesus' sorrowful lament over Jerusalem and the people who spurned His nurturing love. **Like Jeremiah, Jesus expressed His deep emotional pain in spoken words.** The Son of God who came to earth to bear our grief and carry our sorrows[9] understands turmoil within the human spirit.

The Human Experience That Produces Lament

Examples from Scripture help us recognize our genuine need to express confusion and the longings of our hearts directly to God. Loss, pain, and death are regular fare on planet Earth. God does not guarantee even faithful believers a smooth path through or an easy exit from this life. Expression of lament varies among cultures. However, refusal to think and talk about the groanings that arise within us often hurts us.

2: God's chosen city: 1 Kings 9:3; 11:13, 32; 2 Kings 21:4, 7; 1 Chronicles 23:25; 2 Chronicles 6:6; 36:15; Ezra 1:3; 7:15; Psalms 102:21-22; 135:21
3: Jeremiah's call to lament: 2 Chronicles 35:25; Jeremiah 7:29; 15:15-18; 18:19-23
4: Similarities to the book of Jeremiah: Jeremiah 9:1, 18 with Lamentations 2:11; Jeremiah 30:14 with Lamentations 1:2; and others
5: Job's lament: Job 3:3-26; 7:1-21; 10:1-22
6: Laments in Psalms: Psalms 3; 10; 63; 69; 74; 79; 120
7: Other laments: Genesis 6:6; 1 Samuel 1:9-16; 2 Chronicles 20:12; Jeremiah 12:10-13; Habakkuk 1–2; Mark 14:36; 2 Corinthians 7:10; James 5:1
8: Jesus wept: John 11:1-44
9: Jesus, the grief-bearer: Isaiah 53:4

Sin's Sorrowful Impact on This World

The Doctrine of Suffering

Jeremiah's agonizing expressions recorded in Lamentations remind us that sorrows abound in this world. People all around us face physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual pain. Life's natural course involves losing people and things we love. Our human fortitude wanes. Our comfort zones are constantly tested. At times, we feel paralyzed with anguish. Jeremiah personally experienced the consequences of Judah's unrepentant rebellion against God. The heavyhearted prophet expressed the raw physical and emotional pain he felt when God's judgment fell on his beloved city, Jerusalem.

Sin's curse rendered this world a trouble-filled place. While not all suffering directly results from personal sin, the general brokenness of humanity, creation, and society brings hardship in many forms. Certainly, hope abounds for those who seek refuge in God. In gracious and sacrificial love, God sent His Son to break sin's curse and offer salvation to all who trust in Christ. **Believers journey through life simultaneously experiencing pain and embracing hope.** God does not exempt His children from this world's grief but provides the strength to persevere through life's most unexplainable and hurtful moments.

We forfeit an opportunity to grow when we fail to acknowledge and express the reality of personal suffering. Every hard situation offers an opportunity to intentionally yield our sorrow to God's redemptive power. When we suppress our agony under a superficial smile, we fail to reap the deeper benefits God intends for us. **Acknowledging the depth of our internal and external struggles helps us recognize our overwhelming need for God's intervention and sustaining grace.**

God longs for needy people to seek Him for shelter. **God hears and understands our deepest groanings – even pain our words cannot fully express.** Suffering life's difficulties tenderizes our hearts and exposes our need for God. Like Jeremiah, we should learn to cry out to God – our Creator and Sustainer. Jesus Himself experienced the most intense human suffering possible to free us from the paralyzing grip of sin's damage. We should never hesitate to pour out our most honest grievances to God. Trusting God does not require ignoring anguish. What pain or loss should you honestly lament? How will you trust God with your current anguish?

As we stand firmly on sound theology concerning God and His ways, honest expression of profound anguish and confusion proves healthy. Putting deep pain into human words acknowledges our inner turmoil while expressing the buried churning we cannot dismiss. God is not shocked or repelled by your sincere expression of doubt, questions, or unmet expectations. He hears and responds to our sorrowful cries. God tenderly inclines His heart to the needy and hurting. There is no pain in this life that God does not see and understand. Our tears do not turn God away; rather, they draw Him near to us.[10]

10: Tears: Psalm 34:18

Our travail on earth causes us to long for heaven. As we experience life's catastrophes, we are compelled to seek comfort and restoration that only God can provide. **Believers cry out honestly to God – but not without hope.** God's promises meet the pangs of our anguished hearts. We can approach God seeking to trust Him when struggling to do so. While ultimate deliverance can seem like a distant promise, God gives sustaining grace for every trial. Like Jeremiah and the psalmists, expressing the reality of both pain and hope offers a path to trust God in practical ways.

The Practical Benefits of Studying Lamentations

Lamentations provides helpful insights for God's people across all ages. Lingering to reflect on heartache and loss does not always appeal to hurting people. Lamentations may seem like a neglected book within the Bible. Perhaps the raw grief and suffering the book expresses challenges those who want only happy news. **The book of Lamentations offers needed help to us – both in processing our own lives and coming alongside others in pain.** In times like ours, we need a book like this.

This book helps us learn how to honestly cry out to God. God knows, and we cannot ignore, the catastrophic realities we face. We should rightfully express indignation when we observe sin's carnage in our world and people's lives. God made us as emotional beings. **Expressing and processing what we feel helps align our thinking with what God has declared as truth.** Without crying out to God, how can we find any sense of peace in a world so impacted by human suffering?

The book of Lamentations, with its bitter agony and beams of hope, stands within the canon of Scripture for a distinct purpose ordained by God. We approach this book expecting God to teach us something of who we are and who He is. Believers, empowered and indwelt by God's own Spirit, face troubles in this life. God equips His children to face difficulties honestly and in His power. Lamentations serves as a helpful guide for grieving people.

The Message of Lamentations – Lamentations 1–5

An Orderly Response to Disordered Circumstances

The land and people of Judah experienced the chaotic disruption of everything that felt normal, comfortable, and important. Marauding Babylonian troops destroyed their homeland and stole their possessions. The enemy killed and deported their loved ones. Jeremiah stood in the settling dust of his war-torn city and penned poetic words to capture the pain. As humans seeking perspective, we yearn for order when life confuses us. When circumstances spiral out of control, we attempt to control something. Like Jeremiah, we cry out for order. Lamentations is not a rambling account of disjointed emotions. **Jeremiah offered a precisely organized expression of deep anguish.** His orderly approach contrasts with the disarray of a decimated city and disillusioned people.

The Purposeful Emphasis

Jeremiah chose a specific focus for each of his five poetic expressions.

- **Chapter 1:** The Ruined City of Jerusalem – "She" and "her"
- **Chapter 2:** The Judgment Brought by God – "He"
- **Chapter 3:** Jeremiah's Personal Grief and Hope – "I," "me," and "my"
- **Chapter 4:** The People's Loss – "They" and "their"
- **Chapter 5:** The People's Prayer in Light of the Pain – "We" and "us"

The Structured Elaboration

Lamentations divides into five chapters, each presenting a poem with a distinct emphasis. **Jeremiah constructed each of the first four chapters as an acrostic built on the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet.** Chapters 1, 2, and 4 each have 22 verses – one verse per letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The longest poem in chapter 3 contains 66 verses – 3 verses for each letter. This chapter expands Jeremiah's tear-stained words to include promises of hope. Chapter 5 also contains 22 verses but does not follow the acrostic pattern of the other chapters.

Why would Jeremiah write his lament in this way? He chose an intentional format to memorialize Israel's grief. Certainly, such a pattern would facilitate expression and aid memory. But perhaps most dramatically, the structure communicated Jeremiah's desire to express his grief comprehensively – from "A to Z." We often experience emotions that are difficult to explain. Sometimes we express ourselves from every angle with hopes of capturing something meaningful. **Jeremiah's purposeful structure reflects the width and breadth of the suffering he experienced and wanted to explain.**

The Comprehensive Expressions

Jeremiah also utilized multiple literary devices to add meaning and color to his words. We read deeply descriptive prose and poetry. He employed personification in chapter 1, portraying Judah as a bereft widow. In chapter 4, Jeremiah used the technique of comparison and contrast to point out the stark change of circumstances the people faced. With skill and purpose, he changed the pronouns from poem to poem to give each one a unique emphasis. His well-chosen words reflect language from other parts of the Old Testament. Jeremiah's desire to fully express the burden in his heart shines clearly throughout this book.

The Poignant Emotions

The rich expression of deep emotion rises through and beyond Jeremiah's literary techniques. His extreme sorrow resonates throughout this mournful book. **Jeremiah articulated the desperation he felt on behalf of God's people in raw and heartrending terms.** His honest expression of human grief and struggle represents a healthy response to the trouble we face in this world.

Five Sorrowful Songs Lamenting Jerusalem's Fall – 1–5

Jerusalem's Utter Desolation – 1

From where we stand today, we cannot fully appreciate the loss experienced by God's people when Jerusalem fell. **Chapter 1 personifies the ruined city of Jerusalem as a widow who lost everything she lived for.** Jeremiah's descriptive account mirrors a funeral dirge. He processed the "widow city's" ruin as he recounted the graphic details of Jerusalem's demise. The city and temple were burned and ransacked. The people were taken into exile. With no hope for comfort, "Daughter Zion"[11] mourns with weeping and wailing. Jeremiah's description reveals he had witnessed the wreckage himself.[12] Death, starvation, and destruction overtook the beautiful city of Jerusalem.

Jeremiah clearly connected Jerusalem's desolation with her sins. "Jerusalem has sinned greatly and so has become unclean. All who honored her despise her, for they have all see her naked; she herself groans and turns away" (Lamentations 1:8). **Jerusalem's painful loss of beauty, majesty, and treasures came not merely as a military conquest, but by God's hand of righteous judgment.** The chapter ends with a prayer that Jerusalem's conquerors will also face God's judgment.

Jerusalem's Painful Discipline – 2

Chapter 2 cements the conclusion that Jerusalem's pain came as the justified expression of the Lord's wrath. In a "cloud of his anger," God "hurled down the splendor of Israel" (2:1). God's wrath emerges as a theme of this poem. God's righteous anger against sin and its destruction represents the execution of His justice in a timely and purposeful way. God's persistent pleas for repentance demonstrated His patience for people caught in sin's trap. God is slow to anger, but He determines the right time to punish those who refuse to turn to Him.

Jeremiah expressed internal torment over Jerusalem's fate. The mournful heart of God's weeping prophet presents an example of the sorrow we should feel about sin's devastation. **Not only does Jeremiah deeply grieve the painful consequences of Israel's sin, but he also invites the desolate people to call on God.** "Arise, cry out in the night, as the watches of the night begin; pour out your heart like water in the presence of the LORD. Lift up your hands to him for the lives of your children, who faint from hunger at every street corner" (2:19).

Jerusalem's Unquenchable Hope – 3

Chapter 3 offers the longest and most hope-filled expression in the book. This poem erupts from the heart of a "man who has seen affliction" (3:1), capturing Jeremiah's personal sorrow on behalf of the people he loved and served. His vivid descriptions of his personal anguish, physical torment, and emotional bitterness put agonizing words around his brutal pain. His skin and bones bear the weight of suffering. Emotionally, Jeremiah feels consumed by paralyzing agony – walled in by intense grief. He feels attacked, pierced, and mangled by the enemies.

People process grief and loss in various ways. Rarely do we take time to put our deepest pain into excruciating words. **While Jeremiah's expressions are challenging to read, he captured the valleys**

11: Daughter Zion: Lamentations 1:6
12: Details of Jerusalem's defeat: Lamentations 1:7, 10-11, 13, 15, 18-20

of the human spirit in amazing language. The reality of human pain cannot be ignored. Whether or not we find words to express what we experience, recognizing the depths of our struggles helps us turn to God. When we acknowledge the trauma that numbs our human hearts, we stand ready to turn to God – our only source of hope.

Jeremiah recognized that God's promise to bring judgment had come to fruition. As he pondered that reality, his thoughts turned to another certainty. God also promised to faithfully uphold His covenant promises. **The exercise of God's promised judgment brought reassuring hope that rose from Jerusalem's smoky ruins.** Because God remains unchangeably faithful, His purposes prevail over people's desperation.

Jeremiah's downcast heart now intentionally focused on God Himself, not his troubling circumstances. His powerful recitation of truth about God continues to help us today. "Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, 'The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him'" (3:22-24). How can we understand the depths of God's love? Jeremiah burst into praise for God's inestimable faithfulness to unfaithful people. For God's children, every new day dawns with a fresh supply of God's endless mercies. This is good news for sinners who remain in constant need of God's redeeming grace.

God's actions always reflect the consistency of His character. God does not delight in afflicting people. "For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone" (3:33). **Israel received the justice their sins deserved, but God's compassionate heart yearned to restore them to Himself.**[13]

A glimmer of hope stands tall at the center of this book lamenting apparent ruin. The remainder of chapter 3 again reflects God's just recompense on Israel's sins. **With a faith-filled grip on God and His sovereignty, Jeremiah entrusted his sorrowful circumstances to God alone.** The chaos we feel and the uncertainty we experience can firmly rest within the almighty hands of God. God longs for His children to pursue and cling to Him, even as they live amid this world's rubble.

Jerusalem's Suffering People – 4

Lamentations 4 presents the distressing plight of Jerusalem's citizens under the lengthy Babylonian siege. Jeremiah contrasted the people's circumstances at the height of the city's splendor with the terrible suffering they were now experiencing. Precious children once pampered now starved. Princes who lavishly dressed in splendor now died and wasted away. Formerly compassionate women now cooked and ate their own children due to the severe famine. Judah's king, descended from the royal line of David, was taken captive. Deep suffering resulted because the people refused to turn to God.

Prayer for God's Mercy – 5

A passionate prayer on behalf of God's people closes Jeremiah's lament. He asked God to remember their suffering and acknowledge their weariness. Jeremiah lamented the awful trauma the people experienced and called on God to restore them as His people. After pages of woeful words, Jeremiah declared, "You, LORD, reign forever; your throne endures from generation to generation.

13: God's desire to restore: Jeremiah 32:41; Hosea 11:8-9

Why do you always forget us? Why do you forsake us so long? Restore us to yourself, LORD, that we may return; renew our days as of old (5:19-21)."

Jeremiah acknowledged both the awfulness of what he faced and the certainty of who God is. He cried out for God to remember His people. And even as that hopeful prayer rose to God, Jeremiah ended this sorrowful book without a happy ending or joyful resolution. In essence he said, "You are God. Remember your forsaken people – unless it is too late." While we likely wish the book ended with a "happily ever after" conclusion, Jeremiah signs off with the tension unresolved – waiting for what God had declared but what was not yet in view. Scripture tells the rest of the story – God's plan to restore Israel and the world through His Son.

In this life, we will never have the complete picture of God's greater eternal work. Like Jeremiah, there will be moments when we experience unresolved pain. In confusion or uncertainty, we will cry out in anguish to the Lord. Remembering God's certain character and promises offers needed perspective. Most often, we are called to wait for complete resolution. True faith holds on to what God has promised despite circumstances. **God compassionately hears the anguished cries of His suffering people.** Sin's damage is real, but so is God's faithfulness.

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Lamentations records five strategically organized lament poems expressing comprehensive grief over Jerusalem's fall and the exile of God's people. The grievous losses and traumatic suffering came as an act of God's judgment because God's people refused to forsake their sin and turn to Him. With literary precision, the poet we assume to be Jeremiah expressed Israel's grief with raw honesty. While most of the book spells out incredible pain, a beacon of hope rises in the middle of the book, chapter 3. The God who brought the judgment He promised will also fulfill every promise He has made to restore His people. Jeremiah lauded the depths of God's love and the certainty of His faithfulness.

Lamentations records the actual grief of Jeremiah, Jerusalem, and Judah. **The book also provides an example of how God's people should pour out their own anguish to God.** The trouble and suffering in this life cannot be denied and should not be suppressed. God knows and understands every pang we feel as we walk on earth. He stands ready to hear our cries and carry our sorrows.

Apply It

God does not guarantee a pain-free life to anyone. Momentary hardship is one thing, but intense and prolonged suffering deeply tests our faith. Jeremiah witnessed and experienced cruelty and destruction that defied description. Nevertheless, he did his best to put heartfelt words around his pain. With profuse and descriptive words, he poured out his heart to God. Have you ever described your deepest hurts – from "A to Z" – to God? **We do not tell God anything He does not already know, but we gain perspective as we articulate our agony to God.** We sometimes tell people we are "fine" – even when we are not. Today you are most likely facing a challenge that you cannot solve or understand. Something in your life feels chaotic and out of control. God knows the ways you are

not "fine" – so tell Him about it! He knows and listens. He understands and cares. God has purposes beyond your pain. What do you need to pour out to God?

Jeremiah's passionate declaration of God's love and faithfulness exploded in the middle of his record of sadness. He recited and embraced truth about God despite what he felt. **Jeremiah relished God's freshly delivered expressions of faithfulness that met every new day, no matter how sad or defeated he felt.** He acknowledged that he only remained standing and breathing because of God's faithfulness and love. How can you shift your focus from your desperation to the truth of God's power, love, and faithfulness? Listen to music that praises God.[14] Memorize Scripture.[15] Pray and ask God to align your thinking to His.[16] Filter what you see and feel through what you know is true about God and His ways.[17] By the power of God's Spirit, take your anxious thoughts captive.[18] Give a friend in Christ the space to come alongside you to encourage you.[19] Faith involves trusting God in intentional ways about specific circumstances. How will you deliberately set your gaze on God, not your circumstances?

Jeremiah expressed his pain, declared God's faithfulness, and cried out for God's mercy. However, he did not end his book with a superficial smile or a "happily ever after" moment. At the end of his honest confession, Jeremiah embraced the tension of unresolved conflict. **Our observations and experiences do not reveal the ultimate victory God promises.** God knows we gain much by waiting on Him when our gas tank is empty, our strength is failing, and our answers are few. We prefer resolution, but God encourages us to trust Him for the final chapter only He will write. What unresolved situation must you entrust to God? Will you believe that God has plans that exceed your limited understanding as you hang on with weary hands and a fainting heart? Hebrews 11:1 tells us that "faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." We cannot muster up obstacle-crushing faith. We bring only confusion and weakness, and God supplies the rest. Will you join Jeremiah in being humble, honest, and yet hopeful? God can be trusted with everything you cannot understand or control.

14: Singing to God: Colossians 3:16
15: Hiding God's Word in our hearts: Psalm 119:11
16: Praying: 1 Peter 5:6-11
17: Think on truth: Philippians 4:8
18: Captive thoughts: 2 Corinthians 10:5
19: Encouragement: Hebrews 10:24-25

All Scripture quotations in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ® NIV ®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Habakkuk – Conversation With God

Habakkuk

Lesson Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 27 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the notes help you understand the need of your heart to lament and express your struggles to God?

2. What truth from the lecture helped you better understand faithful perseverance with God despite life's hardships?

Second Day: Read Habakkuk 1:1-11.

Habakkuk expressed his confusion directly to God and received God's surprising answer.

3. a. In your own words, what question did Habakkuk voice to God in 1:1-4?

© BSF 2022 (This material may be downloaded from mybsf.org and used by BSF class members in connection with their personal BSF class studies. It may not be otherwise reproduced without BSF's written permission.)

b. What similar questions do people today have about God and how He works?

4. a. How did God preface His answer to Habakkuk in 1:5?

b. What did God announce to Habakkuk in 1:6-11?

5. What have you learned from a situation in which God seemed inactive or silent?

Third Day: Read Habakkuk 1:12–2:20.

Habakkuk asked God a second question and waited on the Lord's answer.

6. a. List the truths that Habakkuk remembered about God in 1:12-13a.

b. What clarity did Habakkuk seek in his second question to God?

c. How do you struggle with how God responds to evil in our world today?

7. What can you learn from Habakkuk's example in 2:1?

8. From Habakkuk 2:4, describe two different ways people respond to God (see also Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; and Hebrews 10:38).

9. Summarize the primary messages God offered in His answer to Habakkuk in 2:6-20.

10. In what ways does the truth God declared in 2:20 speak to Habakkuk's confusion and to you today?

Fourth Day: Read Habakkuk 3:1-15.

Habakkuk prayed to God and remembered His acts of great power on behalf of His people.

11. a. Read 3:2. What request did Habakkuk make of God?

    b. How might you reflect the posture of this prayer today? What might you ask of God?

12. a. Which acts of God, on behalf of His people, did Habakkuk remember in 3:3-15?

    b. What past faithfulness of God encourages you in your present challenges and future uncertainty?

Fifth Day: Read Habakkuk 3:16-19.

Habakkuk resolved to trust God – no matter what.

13. a. What did Habakkuk confess in 3:16?

b. Consider and write down what makes you tremble in fear today. Share with your group if appropriate.

14. a. Describe Habakkuk's bold declaration in 3:17-18. What did he say?

b. Write one or two declarations of your personal faith modeled after those of Habakkuk. Consider your current circumstances and ongoing struggles.

15. a. From 3:19, which truths about God gave rest to Habakkuk's heart?

b. How does this truth specifically encourage you this week?

Sixth Day: Review Habakkuk.

We can rest in God's sovereignty even when we do not understand His mysterious ways.

16. How did Habakkuk's honest conversation with God encourage or help you this week?

Passage Discovery (homiletics, word study, etc.) for Group and Administrative Leaders: Habakkuk

Lecture Notes

Next step: Read Lesson Notes.

Lesson Notes

Habakkuk

Focus Verse

"The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights." – Habakkuk 3:19

Outline

- The Mystery of God's Ways – Habakkuk 1–2
- The Refuge of God's Sovereignty – Habakkuk 3

Engage

In our world today, evil seems to thrive. Dishonesty, theft, and cheating meet with seeming success. People suffer at the hands of oppressors. In certain parts of the world, Christians cannot worship publicly for fear for their lives. We struggle to reconcile the mess we observe in the world with a good, sovereign God. Why does God not quickly answer our prayers or extinguish evildoers so that good prevails? If God is who He says He is, why does the world operate as it does? A thinking person honestly wonders why God allows evil such a destructive reign on earth. Our justifiable questions seldom have simple answers. **What should we do when life presents troubling questions that do not reconcile with how we think God should work?**

Habakkuk saw injustice and wrongdoing at every turn. Throbbing doubts rose within the perplexed prophet. Instead of becoming bitter or inadequately satisfied with human explanations, he took his confusion straight to God. Habakkuk captured his remarkable dialogue with God and shared it with us. God offered surprising answers to honest questions. This book offers great help to people across the ages who seek God while living in a broken and confusing world. **We can rest in God's sovereignty even when we do not understand His mysterious ways.** The answers we most desire from God can be found – in God Himself. Habakkuk helps us rest in this comforting reality.

Who Was Habakkuk?

- **The Prophet:** Habakkuk was from Judah. His name means "one who embraces;" some scholars believe he was a priest involved in temple worship.
- **The Audience:** Habakkuk was the last preexilic prophet to Judah.
- **The Message:** The Lord is on His throne.
- **The Image to Remember:** A question mark

The Mystery of God's Ways – Habakkuk 1–2

A person's entrance into faith often begins with a question. For example, "Who created me?" or "What is the meaning of my life?" or "What really happens after death?" Likewise, questions often propel the faithful to a deeper walk with the Lord. Habakkuk's book begins with honest questions for his God. We are invited to experience a lesson in how to approach God during life's struggles with humility, honesty, and transparency. **God welcomes the honest questions of His people.**

Every Old Testament prophet had a different message, emphasis, and personality. Habakkuk stands apart from the others in that his unique message did not address Judah, Israel, or their enemies. Instead, the book captures Habakkuk's conversations with God, revealing his perplexity over God's dealings with humanity – and particularly His people. Habakkuk especially appeals to someone who questions how God governs the world. **This book encourages the confused person to deliberately bring their questions to God and wait on Him with humility, expectancy, and surrender.** Habakkuk's conversation with God opens with a sob but ends with a song. His nagging questions progress toward a vision of future glory and a chorus of joy over his present circumstances.

Habakkuk's First Question and God's Answer – 1:1-11

Habakkuk's Honest Quandary – 1:1-4

Habakkuk's first question revealed his perplexity over God's seeming indifference to Judah's growing corruption. He asked, "How long, LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen?" God's inaction despite his prayers and Judah's perverse behavior confounded Habakkuk. He wondered why God would not do something about the strife, destruction, and wrongdoing all around him. Habakkuk longed for judgment of the evil surrounding the true and righteous remnant he represented.

Like the psalmist in Psalm 73 and others through the ages, Habakkuk could not understand God's ways. His utter perplexity led him to ask "why?" No matter when or where we live, we could voice this same question to God about many things. We wonder why God does not answer our prayers. **We struggle with what God allows and why He does not act immediately to right wrongdoings that surround us.** We desperately desire clarity. Habakkuk's troubled question resonates with believers across time.

God's Unexpected Answer – 1:5-11

If the situation in Judah left Habakkuk confused, God's answer to his question only confounded him further. God's concern for His perplexed prophet comes through in His direct answer to Habakkuk's honest inquiry. God challenged Habakkuk to "Look at the nations and watch – and be utterly amazed." Habakkuk wondered at God's apparent inaction. God promised He would indeed act – but in a way that would greatly surprise Habakkuk. God seldom does things the way we would!

God had not ignored Judah's wickedness – He was raising up the Babylonians as an instrument of His judgment. We cannot be certain what kind of action Habakkuk wanted God to take. However, he did not expect that God would accomplish His purposes through a nation deemed more wicked than Judah. God declared, "I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people...."

God's Progressive Warnings of Judgment Through His Prophets

God's warnings of judgment escalated from Amos through Habakkuk. Amos (one of the earliest prophets) announced coming judgment at the zenith of Israel's prosperity, summarily saying, "It will come" (Amos 9:1-10). Joel pleaded for Judah's repentance while there was still time (Joel 1:14). Hosea named Israel's enemy until there was no more time left for Israel to repent (Hosea 9:3, 7). Micah named Babylon as Judah's future enemy (Micah 4:10). Zephaniah made the last plea for Judah's repentance (Zephaniah 2:3). In Habakkuk's day the previously prophesied judgments have arrived. There is no more call to repentance. Habakkuk lived in the last days before Judah's exile.

With great detail, God described Babylon's reckless pride and vicious lawlessness. The nation God chose as His instrument of judgment failed to acknowledge Him in any way. "Then they sweep past like the wind and go on – guilty people, whose own strength is their god" (1:11).

Habakkuk's Second Question and God's Answer – 1:12–2:20

Habakkuk's Confusion– 1:12-17

God's shocking answer prompted Habakkuk to ask another question. God would address Judah's sin but in a way that involved suffering at the hands of an evil nation. How could this be? Habakkuk introduced his emerging challenge by first recounting the character and nature of God Himself. Habakkuk preached to himself. He started with what he knew to be true about God – the "everlasting" One, who appointed this treacherous nation to accomplish His will. **Would God – Habakkuk's "Rock," the Holy One whose eyes are "too pure to look on evil" – remain silent while the wicked Babylonians swallowed up Judah?** How could God accomplish good this way? Why would a holy God judge evil with more evil? Habakkuk described the wickedness of the Babylonians as if to remind God of the strangeness of His proposed plan.

Habakkuk's Expectancy – 2:1

Habakkuk should be commended for bringing his real struggles directly to God. He posed an honest question, listened to God's response, and voiced his remaining bewilderment. **With his inner turmoil clearly declared to God, Habakkuk positioned himself to expectantly wait on God's answer.** "I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint."

Habakkuk did not become spiritually idle, bitter, or resentful when God's answer did not match his expectations. He set himself above the chaos all around him to pray and wait with a listening ear for what God would say. Habakkuk patiently waited for God's perfectly timed reply. He shows us how to watch and pray as we wait for God to answer our prayers. Habakkuk did not yet have the answer, but he knew God did. God has His own ways of answering a questioning heart. **God's**

people can find peace in knowing that He will reveal what they long to know when they need to know. God reveals enough truth to His people to enable them to trust Him with what they cannot fully explain.

God's Second Answer – 2:2-20

God's Instructions – 2:2-3

God answered with a revelation of His righteous purposes that far exceeded the scope of Habakkuk's question. **In many ways, God's response forms the timeless answer to every question in every age.** We read these words today because God instructed Habakkuk to write down His message.

God explained to Habakkuk that the fulfillment of His sovereign plan awaited His appointed time. The Babylonians would also face His judgment for their sins. God essentially told Habakkuk to "wait for it." Just as the work of a builder cannot be judged while the scaffolding remains in place, our shortsighted evaluation cannot perceive all that God is doing. Believers experience God's blessings in this life but long for a coming day when their faith becomes sight.[1] From our perspective, God's intervention and answers to our prayers may seem delayed. However, God always acts with impeccable timing to accomplish the greatest good. God desires that we live faithfully while we wait.

God's Answer – 2:4-20

In verse 4, God described two distinct ways humans respond to Him. Some people are "puffed up" with pride and self-will. This basic posture of inner rebellion against God produces evil actions. By contrast, a "righteous person will live by his faithfulness...." Faith in God characterizes people who yield to Him. Believers are justified by faith, but they also live their present lives and await eternity by trusting God.[2] God calls us to trust Him when our faith falters. People either live by faith in God or refuse Him. The proud defend their actions and seek to rule their own lives. The humble look to God in faith for both salvation from sin's penalty and deliverance from sin's power in their daily lives. The posture of the heart impacts the present and sets the course of eternity for every person.

Just as the work of a builder cannot be judged while the scaffolding remains in place, our shortsighted evaluation cannot perceive all that God is doing.

God would not overlook Babylon's cruelty and sin as they brought His judgment against His own people. He enumerated Babylon's specific sins – love of wine, bloodshed, arrogance, oppression, greed, and covetousness. God would use an ungodly people to carry out His perfect plan. Judah would be judged by God through Babylon, but ultimately, Judah would rise to pronounce God's woes of judgment on Babylon.

The way God works often seems strange to us. However, in the end, His sovereign purposes prevail. Verse 14 beautifully expresses the ultimate goal of God's unfolding plan: "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea." **God's glory and purposes will not be compromised by the onslaught of evil.** Verse 20 ends this section with creation's only appropriate response: All the earth sits in silence before the Lord. Habakkuk's questions cease.

1: Faith into sight: John 20:29; 2 Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 11:1; 2 Peter 3:8-11
2: Living by faith: Genesis 15:6; Matthew 4:4; Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38

Trusting the God Who Rules Time and Eternity

The Doctrine of the Sovereignty of God

When we say that God is sovereign, we declare His control of the universe, human history, and all outcomes. Everything God causes or allows works to accomplish His wise purposes and eternal plan.[3] God does not merely realign His plan in response to human events. His sovereign plan determines human history. The truth of God's sovereignty provides untold comfort to God's people but also raises honest questions as we process life and evil's influence in this world.

Habakkuk took his hard questions directly to God. Through his honest conversation, he learned to apply the truth of God's sovereign power to circumstances he could not explain on his own. Habakkuk learned to confidently trust God's wise purposes and rest in His sovereignty no matter what he faced in life. **A proper understanding of God's sovereignty deepens our understanding of so many other important biblical truths.** God's sovereignty undergirds His power to save sinners, orchestrate history, and redeem our lives. Faith grows when we learn to trust that God's good purposes transcend what we observe and experience in life.

The concept of God's sovereignty challenges human thinking. Since the day that sin infected humanity, fallen people have longed to control their own lives in ways they ultimately cannot. Many think that acknowledging God as sovereign makes people merely robots at the mercy of His whims. This wrong thinking does not accurately represent the benevolent and righteous nature of God. **A life not anchored by the wise and purposeful control of almighty God may seem outwardly successful but lacks lasting order, purpose, and clarity.** To refuse to recognize and accept God's sovereignty is like flying in a plane without a pilot or a flight plan.

God is bigger and wiser than we are. He knows all, and we do not. He can do anything; we cannot. Nothing is beyond the reach of God's mighty, sovereign hand. As Habakkuk discovered, God's mysterious ways are often misunderstood. The concept of God's sovereignty baffles us yet comforts us. When you recognize that everything God allows in this world and your life contributes to His eternal plan, you learn to rest in Him. Knowing that history and your destiny rest within God's control produces peace despite confusing circumstances. **Unanswered questions and unexplainable events can be entrusted to the God who rules the universe and eternity with infinite wisdom and precise timing.** How does God's sovereignty provide comfort to you today?

The Refuge of God's Sovereignty – Habakkuk 3

After his rousing dialog with God, Habakkuk joyfully surrendered his perplexity to God's higher purposes. The words recorded in Habakkuk 3 are a prayer – a song of praise to God. This prayer-song utilizes liturgical language and musical notation. This is one reason scholars believe Habakkuk may have been in the Levitical priestly line. This prayer-song was intended for use in

---

3: God's sovereign control: 1 Chronicles 29:11-12; Psalms 47:7; 115:3; Proverbs 19:21; Colossians 1:16

worship by God's people. Just as Habakkuk's struggle and God's replies help people across all time, Habakkuk's prayer also reflects the timeless heart cries of God's people. The beautiful words in this chapter offer hope and help to all believers.

Habakkuk Prayed for God to Act – 3:1-2

Habakkuk praised his fame-worthy God and prayed in essence, "do it again, God!" He wanted a display of God's glory and splendor to be repeated in his day. He asked God to manifest His purposes immediately. Habakkuk recognized God was just but also merciful. He prayed for God to remember mercy – undeserved kindness – even as He exercised His just wrath against His people.[4] Habakkuk based his petition on what he knew about God's character.

Habakkuk Remembered God's Might – 3:3-15

While the poetry here is symbolic and cannot be interpreted with exact clarity, Habakkuk seems to recount events from Israel's history of God's power on display to deliver His people from harm. God led them from Egypt into Canaan, showing His might on their behalf. God overcame their Egyptian oppressors through plagues and the parting of the Red Sea. God's glory shone on Moses at Mount Sinai. These acts of power demonstrated God's goodness and compassion for His suffering people. God's power and intervention upheld His plan. **Remembering God's past faithfulness prepares God's people to expect His present and future faithfulness.**

Human weakness does not shock or repel God who always welcomes us in our frailty. Habakkuk confessed his fear and deliberately chose to bow his knocking knees before the Sovereign One of the universe.

The dramatic descriptions in these verses also foreshadow a future day when God's judgment on earth and the salvation of His people ascend to glorious completion. The God who worked His purposes through the Babylonians will one day reveal His purposes with timely perfection. God extends His compassion and exercises His might to deliver His people. Ultimately, the Messiah will reign without rival and accomplish everything God has promised.

Habakkuk Confessed His Weakness – 3:16

With graphic honesty, Habakkuk described his own experience as he heard this vision from the Lord. He wrote it down as God commanded him to do. "I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled." The physical, emotional, and spiritual turmoil he faced was real. Human weakness does not shock or repel God, who always welcomes us in our frailty. **Habakkuk confessed his fear and deliberately chose to bow his knocking knees before the Sovereign One of the universe.**

Habakkuk Praised God Unconditionally – 3:17-19

After his honest battle and humble surrender, Habakkuk determined that his security could only be found in God, not in favorable circumstances. He evaluated everything he faced in light

---

4: God's mercy: Deuteronomy 7:9; Psalms 86:5; 89:14; Luke 6:36; James 3:17

of God's revelation of His person and character. He chose to rejoice, even if he lost every earthly comfort. He faced the approaching terror of the Babylonian invasion with resolve to trust God, no matter what. Habakkuk's example leads us to gloriously declare that come what may, God can be trusted. Even if the worst happened, Habakkuk vowed to wait for God and rejoice in Him. Habakkuk's strength – the strength required to walk over, not under, the mountains of his difficulties – came from God alone. While his troubling situation had not changed, Habakkuk's understanding of God had grown immensely.

Like Habakkuk, God's people can face challenging times with overcoming faith. Similar to our puzzled prophet, we can pray, "Though my health fails and my loved ones die – I will trust you God. Though I lose my livelihood and every earthly security – I know my God loves and cares for me." God does not do things the way we would. Whether or not we understand what He is doing, God is worthy of our undivided trust and wholehearted praise. **We can rest in God's sovereignty even when we do not understand His mysterious ways.**

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Habakkuk lived as one of God's last prophets before Judah's exile. He witnessed Judah's flagrant evil and struggled at God's seeming inaction to bring the just judgment that His righteous character demanded. **Habakkuk took his doubts and complaints directly to God.** First, he asked why God allowed Judah's overt sin to go unpunished. While Habakkuk could not explain God's plan, he was unprepared for God's answer to his honest question. The vile and violent Babylonians would come as God's instrument of judgment against His own people. If God's seeming inaction confused Habakkuk, His promised action confounded him even more. Would God really use an even more wicked nation against His own people? Habakkuk voiced his questions and expectantly waited on God's answer.

God instructed Habakkuk to record His answer for all to see. Though judgment would be brought on Judah by the Babylonians, their sin and violence also awaited His certain judgment. God called the entire world to reverent silence before Him, the Potentate of time and eternity. Habakkuk's questions were real, but so is the choice God leaves with us. **God's sovereign yet mysterious ways can be trusted.** Habakkuk ended his book with a humble and confident declaration. No matter what life brought his way, Habakkuk vowed to trust God and find rest within His trustworthy control. He confessed his unwavering confidence in God, whether he experienced plenty, lack, joy, or sorrow. With exultant song, Habakkuk declared trust in his sovereign Lord to enable him to victoriously tread over mountains in God's strength alone.

Apply It

Throughout this study, we have journeyed with Israel and God's prophets through tragic times. Rampant sin and disappointment have marked most of our lessons. Both Israel and Judah faced suffering and exile. In Lamentations, Jeremiah poured out his grief to God. Habakkuk voiced his honest questions to God. Both books reinforce powerful truths about God and teach practical

lessons to us. **When we recognize who God is and how He loves us, we do not hesitate to go straight to Him with our pain, questions, and doubts.** God understands our deepest needs better than we do. Only God can answer our throbbing questions and offer peace if those questions remain unanswered. The Creator and Sustainer of the universe and your life listens, understands, and longs to help you. Hard times and tough questions remain a certainty in this life but so does God. In fact, God is the most certain certainty of all. What do you need to honestly surrender to Him today?

Habakkuk found himself caught in the gap between what he knew about God and what he saw happening in his world. Believers today experience that same uncomfortable space – living in "the now" while longing for "the not yet." God's promised resolution seems far off. What helps us hold on to what we know is true when circumstances tell us otherwise? In times of confusion, step back and think about God. Recounting unchangeable truths about God realigns our perspective. The Holy Spirit enables us to courageously trust God for what He has declared as true. God also calls us to live as a unique kind of people in the face of the confusion around us. Habakkuk remembered who God was – the eternal, almighty, holy, and faithful One who was his Rock and steadfast hope.[5] **True faith looks beyond visible circumstances to embrace unseen realities.**[6] What will you determine to believe while you are waiting for all God has promised? Will you be who God asks you to be in the meantime? What truth about God provides the strength you need today?

Habakkuk's confusion transformed into a joyous song. He pondered God's mysterious ways and sought refuge in God's sovereignty. There is no better place to find rest. Does your happiness depend on easy days with pleasant ways? Do you question God's goodness and love for you when life becomes unexpectedly confusing or difficult? Do you doubt God when you cannot figure out what He is doing? As fallen humans, we long for control that only belongs to God. **Because God is who He is, His sovereign but mysterious ways can be utterly trusted.** The God who seeks sinners sent His Son as Savior. He promises to end sin's terror, and He can be trusted to reign over this world and your life. God's holiness, might, compassion, justice, and faithfulness stand behind everything His sovereign will allows. While we wait on God to bring all that He has promised to pass, we seek to live faithfully and reflect His presence in the world. How will you choose to reconcile what you don't understand about life with what you do know about God? God's sovereignty provides shelter, peace, and joy as we navigate life's struggles and await eternity's resolution. We have a calling to pursue in loving Him and serving others. How will you struggle honestly and rejoice expectantly, along with Habakkuk, this week?

5: God, the Rock: Habakkuk 1:12; 2:14; 3:3-4, 19
6: Faith in the unseen: Hebrews 11:1

All Scripture quotations in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ® NIV ®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

God's Purposeful Plan Through the Divided Kingdom

Micah 7:18-19; Jeremiah 4:22; Romans 15:4; and various Scriptures

Lesson Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 28 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What truths from the notes helped you understand and relate to Habakkuk's struggle? What did you learn?

2. How did the lecture help you understand or find peace regarding God and His mysterious ways?

This lesson reflects on our study of Israel's divided kingdom to draw lessons about God, ourselves, and human history. Take time to think broadly and deeply to recognize what God has taught you.

Second Day: Read Isaiah 40:21-31 and Micah 7:18-19.

Knowing truth about God undergirds our lives and prepares us for eternity.

3. From Isaiah 40:21-31 and Micah 7:18-19, how would you describe God?

© BSF 2022 (This material may be downloaded from mybsf.org and used by BSF class members in connection with their personal BSF class studies. It may not be otherwise reproduced without BSF's written permission.)

4. God revealed Himself to the people of Israel and Judah and to His prophets. Give examples from Scriptures studied this year of God's:

   Power

   Supremacy

   Compassion

5. a. Why is God's revelation of Himself in Scripture important?

   b. What specific truth about God gives you strength and hope?

Third Day: Jeremiah 4:22.

God remains faithful and compassionate despite human failure.

6. a. What did you learn from the persistent rebellion of the leaders and people of Israel and Judah?

   b. In what way does Israel's painful history offer perspective on God's work in the world today?

   c. How do Israel's and Judah's failures illustrate your own battle with sin and submission to God?

7. How did this study enlarge your gratitude for God's heart for sinners and the sacrifice of His Son to bring salvation (see Isaiah 53)?

8. Write a sentence or two praising God for His mercy and grace toward needy and rebellious people.

Fourth Day: Read Romans 9:1-5 and 1 Corinthians 10:1-12.

Nothing is more important than knowing and walking with God.

9. Read Acts 17:28 and 1 John 1:1-7. Why is knowing and walking with God so vital for true human flourishing?

10. a. In what ways did God's people squander His grace and forfeit His blessings (see Jeremiah 5:23-31; Hosea 11; and 2 Chronicles 34:23-26)?

    b. How are you tempted to take God's grace for granted?

11. How has your personal relationship with God brought stability into the joys and struggles of your life?

12. God alone deserves glory and worship. In what ways has God's Word led you to worship Him?

Fifth Day: Read Romans 15:4.

Israel's history through the divided kingdom and into exile teaches important lessons worth remembering.

13. a. How has God taken you beyond the complex facts as you studied unfamiliar passages this year?

b. In what ways were you stretched to recognize deeper truths and lessons?

14. a. What book or portion of the study surprised you with its relevance to your life?

b. How did this study offer helpful perspective on God's sovereignty over world events?

c. Share one meaningful verse or passage that stood out to you.

15. Write one sentence that summarizes God's message to you through this study.

Sixth Day: Reflect on God's faithfulness to you in light of our study.

God continually moves toward rebellious people.

16. How are you encouraged by God's tenacious pursuit of your heart?

No homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders

Lecture Notes

Next step: Read Lesson Notes.

Lesson Notes

Micah 7:18-19; Jeremiah 4:22; Romans 15:4; and various Scriptures

Focus Verse

"All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations." – Isaiah 65:2

Outline

- Divine Realities – Micah 7:18-19
- Human Realities – Jeremiah 4:22
- Emerging Lessons – Romans 15:4

Engage

How amazing is it that the Almighty, the eternal God reveals Himself to people on earth? **God gave us His Word, His Spirit, and His people to help us understand essential truths about life and eternity.** This year, we studied and discussed important passages in the Old Testament. Alone with our Bibles and gathered in our groups, we explored the historical narrative of Israel and Judah. We read the words God spoke through His prophets. These ancient words present more than an interesting story. God's gracious revelation comes to us through kings and prophets – through rebukes, warnings, and promises. Studying God's Word offers a life-changing experience, not just an academic exercise.

Though the people we studied failed repeatedly, God did not. His heart and desires for wayward people never waver. Throughout Israel's history, God's outstretched arms persistently invited His people to find their highest purpose by seeking Him. **God continually moves toward rebellious people.** This poignant truth powerfully applies to us today. The God who spoke through Elijah, Amos, Nahum, Micah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah speaks to us today. Through His Word, God warns of sin's consequences and offers salvation through His Son. His promises provide strength for today's struggles and anticipation of eternity's glory. We study the Bible to be transformed by God's Spirit. We meditate on Scripture to better know and worship God. When we lean into the eternal truth of God's Word, we recognize our inner rebellion and realize God's power to redeem what sin has destroyed.

As we finish this year's study, we pause to reflect on what we have learned about God, His people, and ourselves. The storyline of a divided kingdom, patterns of idolatry, and moments of repentance gave way to God's judgment on His wayward people. In many ways, this sad chapter in Israel's history proves difficult to read. A look back helps us move forward and apply important lessons to our lives.

Truth about God stabilizes our thinking and reorients our perspective. Israel and Judah's story and the prophets who spoke for God through those turbulent times instruct us. As we shine light on

God's character, we can also honestly reflect on the persistent sin prevalent in Israel and Judah. We do not study their downfall to merely analyze and criticize their waywardness. **Important lessons about history, human nature, and our own struggles arise from this story of costly failure.**

Divine Realities – Micah 7:18-19

"Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea."

We gaze at God to ponder all that He is. Along with Micah, we ask, "Who is a God like you?" The amazing wonder we confess is that no one is like Him. Our eternal God stands apart from us and every lesser idol in countless ways. Everything God does helps us understand who He is. **Israel's story upholds God's justice alongside His compassion for sinners who pursue their own ways.** God's Spirit unveils life's greatest treasure when we realize the seriousness of our sin and experience God's undeserved forgiveness through His Son.

God's Stabilizing Character – Isaiah 25:1

"Lord, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done wonderful things, things planned long ago."

His Glorious Attributes

God's attributes help us understand His majestic character. None of God's infinite qualities operates independently of all the others; He never compromises one aspect of His character to exercise another. **Reflecting on what we have learned about God helps us recognize how His unchanging character remains in full operation today.**

God's omnipotence – His unlimited power – acts on behalf of His people in many ways. God can do anything He wills. He demonstrated His power through both Elijah's public miracles and Elisha's private miracles. He rules over creation, bringing drought and rain by His command.[1] At God's word, ravens fed fleeing Elijah.[2] God multiplied the oil and flour of a starving widow[3] and raised her dead son back to life.[4] God also intervened dramatically in military battles on behalf of His people.[5] God designed intentional displays of His power to prove to needy people that He ruled heaven and earth. **The God who can do anything can be trusted with everything.**

God revealed His supremacy – His rightful exalted status over everything – as He exposed the futility of idolatry. Elijah's bold confrontation of the prophets of Baal demonstrated that no one and nothing can truly challenge God.[6] After this dramatic display, the people declared, "The Lord – He is God! The Lord – He is God!"[7] Isaiah's vision of God on His throne clearly exhibited God's supremacy.[8]

1: Drought and rain: 1 Kings 17:1; 18:45
2: Ravens: 1 Kings 17:2-6
3: Multiplied food: 1 Kings 17:7-16
4: Raised to life: 1 Kings 17:17-24
5: Military conquest: 1 Kings 20:13, 28; 2 Kings 3:15-25; 6:8-23; 19
6: Supremacy over Baal: 1 Kings 18:16-38
7: The Lord is God: 1 Kings 18:39
8: Isaiah's vision: Isaiah 6:1-4

Indeed, our Creator God reigns above and apart from everyone and everything else. **The God who rules supremely deserves exclusive worship.**

God's compassion for people provides great comfort as we consider His unlimited power and exalted status. The infinitely holy God tenderly understands our frailties and weaknesses. God's persistent patience with sinning Israel demonstrates His great love for the people He created. Our sinfulness cannot eradicate His love for us. In compassion, God intervenes to alleviate human suffering. He allowed Elisha to purify tainted stew[9] and recover a borrowed axhead for struggling prophets.[10] God even showed mercy to rebellious kings.[11] In His ultimate act of supreme compassion, God provided a way of salvation through His Son for desperate sinners. **The God who compassionately seeks sinners meets us at our point of need.**

Our Only Refuge

Many aspects of God's character shine throughout this year's study. His perfect holiness, justice, mercy, love, and goodness abound. **God's certain promises and the fulfillment of His eternal plan rest soundly on the absolute sovereignty of God Himself.** As we study God's Word and walk with Him, we experience more and more of God's vastness and trustworthiness. Our days on earth and an endless eternity cannot exhaust the width and breadth of praise that belong to God.

Throughout our study, God continued to call His covenant people to thrive in submission and obedience to Him. When Israel and Judah strayed into sin and idolatry, they faltered. True security and human flourishing can only be found in surrender to God. Life in this fallen world brings all kinds of trouble, but God remains the refuge for all who call on Him. **The God who loves you perfectly provides the only true source of shelter in this life and for eternity.** Jeremiah 16:19 says: "LORD, my strength and my fortress, my refuge in time of distress, to you the nations will come from the ends of the earth...."

God's Steadfast Presence – Isaiah 41:10

"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

God is omnipresent. The fullness of God's being is always present everywhere, never restricted by time or space. **The people of Israel experienced God's presence in intensely personal and powerful ways.** God was not just "everywhere" – He was their God who was near to them.[12] Their greatest good, as individuals and as a nation, was found in obeying God – seeking and surrendering to His manifest presence.

When Israel's leaders and people rejected God as an intimate part of everyday life, the nation floundered. When they lived with constant awareness of Him, they flourished.[13] **God was present among His people – ready, willing, and able to guide, protect, and lead them to their highest purpose as a nation.** This very same God remains present with us, undeterred by our sinful wandering. The omnipresent God dwells with us in practical and personal ways. He meets us amid life's chaos.

9: Purified stew: 2 Kings 4:38-41
10: Recovered axhead: 2 Kings 6:1-7
11: Compassion for rebels: 1 Kings 21:27-29; 2 Chronicles 32:24-31; 33:11-17
12: The God of Israel: Isaiah 41:13-14; 43:1
13: Flourishing in obedience: 2 Kings 18:5-8; Isaiah 1:18-20; Jeremiah 4:1-2; Amos 5:4-6, 14-15

Life's Highest Calling and Greatest Privilege

The Doctrine of Humanity – Creation and Purpose

Unlike animals or plants, God created people with the capacity to know and relate to Him. God stamps His image upon every human being.[14] Our Creator God longs to fellowship with us.[15] Humanity's fall into sin represents the greatest tragedy in human history.[16] God designed people for eternity even while they live on earth. His intended purpose for humankind is to love Him, glorify Him, and enjoy Him forever.

Israel and Judah's story vividly illustrates the profound truth that every person and nation find their ultimate purpose by living in a right relationship with God. God desired for His chosen people to walk faithfully with Him and represent Him to the world. He gave them laws to follow, but God's deepest desire was that they love Him with their hearts, souls, and minds.[17] God promised blessings that hinged on their obedience and curses if they turned from Him. Their exile marked the fulfillment of those promises.

To spurn God's love and reject Him means living a life that misses the mark. Christians mourn the eternal destiny of loved ones who do not seek salvation in Christ. However, much is lost in this life as well when someone fails to honor God and surrender to Him. **Nothing this world offers can truly satisfy the longings of the human soul.** Rejecting God requires suppressing evidence of His creative power and powerful presence.[18]

Those who seek God experience incredible joy on earth and anticipate heaven's glory. God's blessings cannot be measured by the absence of obstacles. God's blessings rest on His children, even when they face challenges. By God's grace, a believer communes with Him in an intimate and personal way. Through God's Spirit, the eternal human spirit experiences fellowship with eternal God. Awareness of God's presence, sensitivity to His leading, and gratitude for His blessings can permeate life, even amid difficulties. **There is no higher calling or more lasting joy than knowing God and walking with Him.**

God demonstrated His powerful presence in tangible ways. God faithfully upheld His people – in battles against enemies, when facing internal and external calamities, or in moments of private need – when they turned to Him. Asa faced a formidable enemy and cried out to God who delivered Judah's vastly outnumbered army.[19] God's presence comforted Elijah when he fainted in weariness.[20] Jonah could not flee far enough or deep enough to escape the Lord's powerful presence.[21] Isaiah witnessed God's glory – a vision that propelled his long and faithful ministry.[22] As God called Jeremiah to incredibly painful service, He promised, "They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you..." (Jeremiah 1:19).

14: God's image: Genesis 1:26-27; 5:1; 9:6; Colossians 3:10; James 3:9
15: Fellowship with God: 1 Corinthians 1:9; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 John 1:1-7
16: The Fall: Genesis 3
17: Love for God: Deuteronomy 6:4-5
18: Suppressing truth: Romans 1:18-20
19: Asa's victory: 2 Chronicles 14:8-15
20: Elijah's struggle: 1 Kings 19
21: Jonah's flight: Jonah 1–2
22: Isaiah's vision: Isaiah 6

God remains vigilant and available in every time zone and era of human history – He is present with us in every situation we face. God hovers close enough to hear the whispered prayer of the smallest child. God is near you today, no matter what you face.

God would not let go of His people, despite their resistance. He sent prophet after prophet, speaking directly into their situations and exposing their specific sins. He offered countless opportunities for repentance. God repeated His warnings of pending judgment. God revealed His compassionate heart by relentlessly pursuing His disobedient people. Isaiah summarized this well: "But now, this is what the LORD says – he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: 'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior" (Isaiah 43:1-3a).

Human Realities – Jeremiah 4:22

"My people are fools; they do not know me. They are senseless children; they have no understanding. They are skilled at doing evil; they know not how to do good."

The Constancy of Human Failure – 2 Chronicles 36:16

"But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people and there was no remedy."

The perpetual failure of people stands in stark contrast to God's untarnished record of faithfulness. The magnitude and pervasiveness of human failings elevate the wonder of God's mercy.

Israel's History

Despite God's revelation of Himself and their immense spiritual privilege, God's chosen people failed so miserably that they ended up dispersed in foreign lands. Our study began with Solomon's failures in spite of God's abundant blessing.[23] The disarray Solomon left behind caused Israel to split into two kingdoms under Rehoboam and Jeroboam.[24]

Founded on idolatry from its beginning,[25] the northern kingdom of Israel endured a painful parade of kings who seemed to outdo one another in pursuing perverse evil. Sin escalated as God's compassionate warnings were ignored. Eventually, God sent the Assyrians to attack the northern kingdom and take the people into exile.[26]

The southern kingdom of Judah saw a few good kings who enacted spiritual reforms and sought to eradicate idolatry.[27] God blessed these seasons of obedience, but the people did not seek God wholeheartedly. No amount of laws, even from God, can repair our brokenness. God promised a new covenant, bringing a new heart and His power to accomplish what human effort cannot.

23: Solomon's failings: 1 Kings 9–11
24: Kingdom divided: 1 Kings 12
25: Jeroboam's idolatry: 1 Kings 12:25-33
26: Assyrian exile: 2 Kings 17
27: Spiritual revival: 2 Kings 18:1-8; 22:1–23:25; 2 Chronicles 34:1–35:19

Judah's last four kings did evil in God's sight. The nation fell to the Babylonians who destroyed the city of Jerusalem and deported the people.[28] God's redemptive plan prevailed, despite this painful period. By His power and grace, God preserved David's royal lineage and the promise of Messiah. He sustained a faithful minority of steadfast believers among the unfaithful majority. **Human failure cannot thwart God's purposes.** After the exile, God called His preserved remnant to return to the land and begin rebuilding the wreckage of Jerusalem.

Our Experience

The slice of human history we experience also displays human failure and the downward spiral of sin. **No matter where or when we live, societal decline and our own battle with personal sin confirms our desperate need for the salvation only God can provide.** Life's distractions can blind us to matters of eternity. In every age, Satan opposes God's truth. The world's systems resist God's benevolent rule. In ancient days and in our day, people who stand for God often stand against a world that opposes Him.

God Promised and Provided a Savior

Israel and her kings failed, but God's promised King prevails. A greater King was indeed coming – God's own Son, the Messiah. Just as God promised through Isaiah, a branch from Jesse's charred root sprang to life.[29] **God's Son took on human flesh and walked among the desperate people of earth.** Jesus died as the perfect sin-bearer.[30] He will come again to reign and rule without rival.

Humanity's sin could not stop God's compassionate heart or His plan of redemption. **Israel's failures, and our own, reveal how much we need a Savior.** There is good news. God has provided a Savior – The Lord Jesus Christ! When we place our faith in Him, we experience a new birth that changes our hearts as God graciously supplies His power through His Spirit.

Emerging Lessons – Romans 15:4

"For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope."

Waiting

Current Chaos

We finish with Israel and Judah in seeming limbo – exiled to foreign lands. The hope for these scattered people rested in God's promises rather than their current reality. Prophets foretold their judgment alongside future restoration. They were challenged to be a blessing in the foreign land where they lived while they waited for that day.[31] Our lives often feel stalled at uncomfortable places. Our current circumstances cannot reveal all that God has planned or will accomplish. **By faith, we trust God's certain promises while we wait for His full plan to unfold.**

28: Judah's fall: 2 Chronicles 36
29: Jesse's charred stump: Isaiah 6:13; 11:1-5; 12:1-6
30: Jesus' death: Isaiah 53
31: Blessing in exile: Jeremiah 29

Present Purpose

Habakkuk trusted in the sovereign God – *come what may*.[32] God does not want us to cower in fear while we await future resolution. **By God's grace and through His power, we can have joy and peace while living through painful situations.** Right now, God wants to fill you with hope that transcends every challenge you face.

The prophets frequently reminded God's people of their responsibility to treat others as He intended. Your walk with God incorporates more than just you and God. To walk with God means seeing and caring about others. **God's call to peace and justice is a call for His people to reflect His character.** We live out the great commandment[33] and the great commission.[34]

Future Hope

Through His prophets, God promised His exiled people both present comfort and hope for the future. **God's overcoming power and prevailing purposes shine light and hope into today's calamities.** Believers today live assured that Jesus Christ will return to finish what He started. Justice will triumph. Sin's dominion will end. Everything God has promised will happen.

Worshiping

Surrender to God

True worship involves wholehearted surrender to God. We worship Him when we recognize His rightful rule over our lives and our world. God's judgment fell on Israel because they refused to yield to God and worshiped idols. We surrender to God when we choose His ways over our own. Yielding to God allows us to experience His faithfulness to meet our needs. **We submit to God, not for personal benefit, but because He alone is worthy of our supreme loyalty, trust, and devotion.** We care for and serve our neighbors with love and concern.

Speak for God

God prepared many prophets to speak His message to wayward people. Each one stepped into a specific situation to voice God's particular message. Today, God has called a people to represent Him in the world. Through His Son and in His Word, God revealed Himself and His plan to save us from our sins and a wasted life. **We share the gospel and present hope beyond the shallow, hollow substitutes this world offers.** Every believer has a message that someone needs to hear. What a privilege!

Shelter in God

The storms of life are certain. The world's pressures are constant. Sin's damage is pervasive. **Only in God can we find true refuge.** The final verse written by the final prophet we studied this year could not say it better: "The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights" (Habakkuk 3:19).

32: Habakkuk's peace: Habakkuk 3:17-19
33: Great commandment: Matthew 22:37
34: Great commission: Matthew 28:18-20

The God of eternity knows our deepest needs. He did not sit and smugly watch humanity crash and burn. He sent prophets to call Israel to repentance. God sent His Son to bring the only true hope known to humanity. **God continually moves toward rebellious people.** Israel's story is our story; Israel's Savior is our Savior. This study reveals God's persistent love for His people and the lengths to which He will go to fulfill His promises and purposes. What a compassionate, merciful God!

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

After Solomon squandered God's blessings, his kingdom split in two. Both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah failed to live as God's covenant people. They fell into flagrant sin and idolatry. While their story contained hope-filled moments of seeking God, an ultimately rebellious trajectory led to God's promised judgment. First, Israel fell to Assyria, then Judah to Babylon. Their land was destroyed, and the inhabitants dispersed to foreign lands. **God's good purposes prevailed, despite the purifying judgment Israel and Judah faced.** God's people awaited a future beyond this painful period of division and exile. At the proper time, God sent His Son – the promised Messiah. Israel's hope became our salvation. We share that blessing and anticipate more to come. We live in God's hands, ready for Him to guide us as we rest by faith in Him.

Our lessons reveal far more than the sad tale of a sinful people. In persistent mercy and unconditional love, God sent prophet after prophet to speak for Him. God kept His word as judgment fell – a sobering yet hopeful reminder that His promises of restoration remain just as certain today. Israel's story proclaims much about God and a lot about us. **God meets us in our sinfulness and pursues us despite our waywardness; only in Him do we find true peace and refuge.**

Apply It

Everything we learn about God matters. **God has revealed enough about Himself to make it right and reasonable for us to wholeheartedly trust Him.** We can look back on our lives and recall how God has persistently pursued us and upheld us by His power and sufficiency. Truth about God compels us to obedience as we learn about Him. We thrive spiritually when we remember and believe what is true about God. Our lives offer an opportunity to appropriate truth about God in specific ways. His power, compassion, faithfulness, goodness, sovereignty, and every other attribute help us align our visible reality with the unseen certainty of His character. God cannot violate His nature in any way. Everything He does and all that He allows us to face provide a platform to give Him glory. What specific truth about God from this study has elevated your thinking and stabilized your life?

We do not particularly enjoy thinking about Israel's failings – or our own. We prefer happy endings and feeling victorious. However, we need to face reality. Only when we realize our frailty and the depths of sinfulness lurking within our hearts will we turn to God as we should. The rebellion that ravaged Israel rattles around within us and often between us. We constantly seek to rule our lives in ways that only God should. Our neediness elevates God's mercy and grace. Only God can bring wholeness from human brokenness. How amazing that He delights to do so! Our wayward hearts do not repulse God. The same God who hates sin loves sinners. How has God exposed your own

brokenness to lead you to Himself? If you are facing a losing battle or a struggle that has stripped you of answers, recognize God's opportunity. **An honest view of self prepares you to turn to God.** What is God showing you about the battles within your own heart? How does that truth humble you before Him?

God brought you here to accomplish something specific in your life. He intends more for you than an intellectual grasp of Israel's story and the themes of often-neglected Old Testament prophets. He knows the life challenges you encountered as you read through Micah or Isaiah. He put you in a group of people who walked with you through the long list of errant kings and the stories with many twists and turns. In tender compassion, God brought specific conviction and customized encouragement for you. How will you embrace God's call to care for others in a new light? He does not want you to end this study merely smarter about the Old Testament. He persistently invites you to surrender to Him in some fresh way. What has God said to you this year? How will you respond to His outstretched hand and loving embrace?

All Scripture quotations in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ® NIV ®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Final Reflections

Lesson Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 29 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the notes help crystallize what you learned from this study? What stood out and how does that truth apply to your life?

2. In what way did the lecture encourage or challenge you to apply what you have learned?

Second Day: Magnifying God

3. How did God deepen your appreciation for His Word – especially the Old Testament?

© BSF 2022 (This material may be downloaded from mybsf.org and used by BSF class members in connection with their personal BSF class studies. It may not be otherwise reproduced without BSF's written permission.)

4. In what way was your view of God and how He works expanded?

5. As you studied, which particular book, prophet, king, or lesson spoke to you in a way that stretched your faith?

Third Day: Studying the Bible in Community

6. How were you blessed by the fellowship within your group?

7. What did you learn as you supported one another in prayer?

Fourth Day: The Next Generation

8. If you had children in the Kids Program or students in the Student Program, how has their participation been a blessing to you?

9. How did your children or students benefit from their participation?

10. If you volunteered with the children or students this year, how were you blessed?

Fifth Day: Facing Outward

11. In what ways did the blessings of this study overflow into your family, neighborhood, church, school, or workplace?

12. How did God challenge or encourage you regarding your attitude or actions toward others?

Sixth Day: Maturing His People

13. Pick one word that describes your experience with the Lord and His Word this year.

14. In what way is God calling you to a deeper trust or greater confidence in His plan for your life and this world?

15. Spiritual growth involves recognizing personal sin and yielding to God. What was the most convicting message God spoke to you this year, and how did you respond?

16. Write a short prayer expressing your commitment to God and gratitude for His persistent pursuit of your heart.

Bible Study Fellowship®

Global Headquarters, 19001 Huebner Road
San Antonio, Texas 78258-4019
ph: 210.492.4676, f: 210.493.4111
www.bsfinternational.org

Dear _____,

We at Bible Study Fellowship grant you and your vendor permission to print your _ _____.

Please contact Bible Study Fellowship Headquarters with any questions.

Sincerely,

Chad Lackey

Chad Lackey
Chief Administrative Officer